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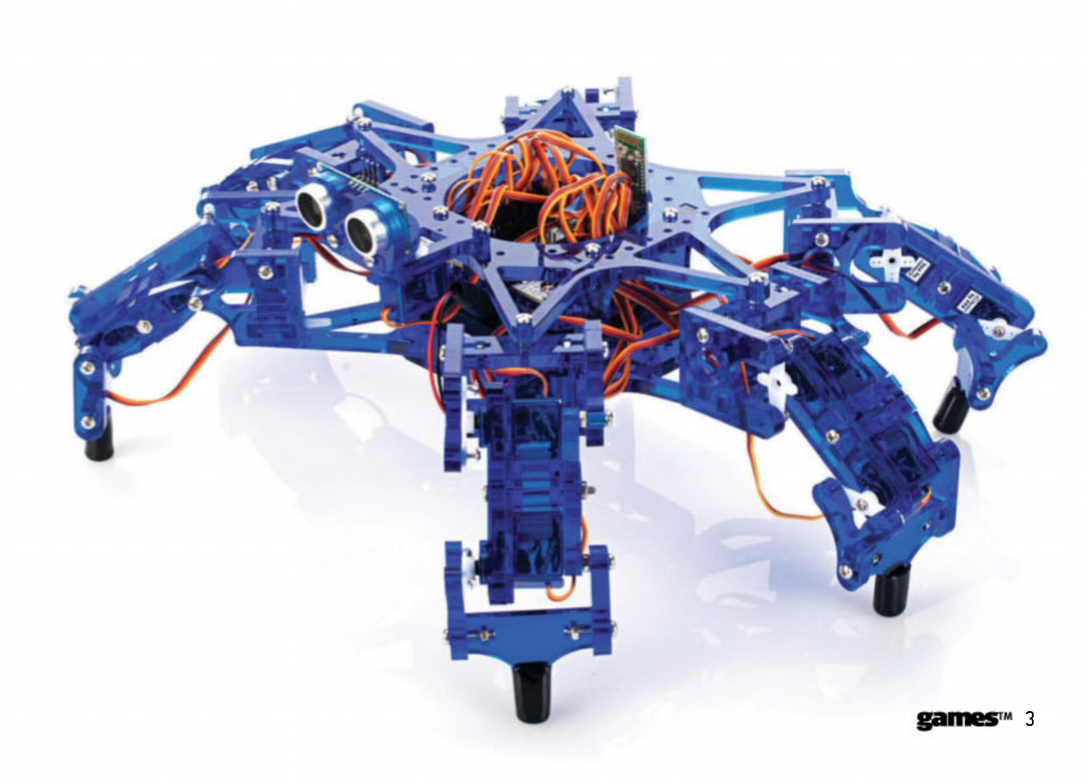
There's nothing quite like the excitement and tension that surrounds a new first-party exclusive that's also a brand new IP. In fact there are few things in gaming that I look forward to seeing more. Sure, it's not always a great success and more often than not it's not the first game that really sets the bar (*Uncharted* being a good example), but when you have the combination of new ideas, an unknown world and first-party backing, you have a baseline of expectation that's higher than your typical game release.

For me, *Horizon Zero Dawn* adds another fascinating element and that's seeing a developer move out of its comfort zone into ambitious and untested territory. Making an open-world RPG is nothing like the kind of structured first-person shooter games this team has handled up until now, but not unlike hearing a metal band play their most famous tracks acoustically, the change of instrument could facilitate something really beautiful.

I applaud any developer willing to take that leap and challenge itself when it has done so well with a tried-and-tested formula. It may not pay off, but we've seen plenty of examples in the past where a new perspective can deliver something truly refreshing from a classic genre. *Horizon* is showing all the signs of being that kind of game.

Jon Gordon

Jonathan Gordon
EDITOR




0/3 BODIES
1/83 ITEMS
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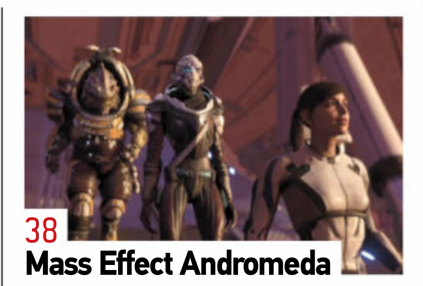


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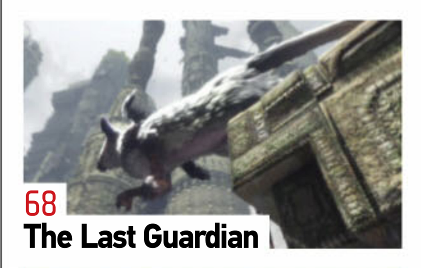
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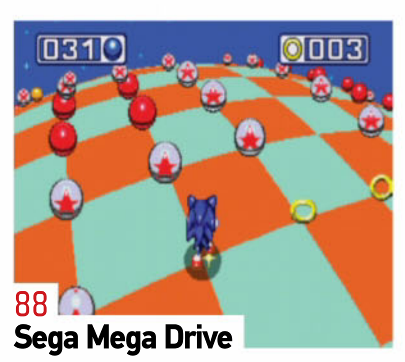
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FORCED REALITY

The VR arms race is on

→ Can Oculus and Sony hold pace with HTC?

With headset sales stagnating and an ever-growing list of developers claiming that there is no money to be made in ongoing virtual reality development, it looked as if the VR revolution might be coming to an abrupt, inconclusive end. But don't tell that to HTC, as the company clearly still sees huge room for growth in the technology's future; undeterred by the problems and inspired by its potential to continue innovating and evolving.

> "A handful of impressive new announcements have once again raised the bar for commercial-grade VR"

A handful of impressive new announcements have once again raised the bar for commercial-grade VR, leaving Oculus – and to a certain extent, Sony – in danger of looking woefully behind the curve. HTC Vive is the most expensive of the three VR headsets on the market – in respect to its premium price tag and premium space requirements – but that cost is offset by the far superior experience it offers for gamers and creators alike. Room-tracking feels like a genuine revolution for gaming, the high-resolution screens are above and beyond the competition, while the hardware design continues to make the Vive feel like a product you'd expect to see on the set of a far-reaching science-fiction film rather than a part of your living room experience.

That status quo isn't going to change any time soon as HTC reveals an all-new

Right While initial sales of the Vive and Rift were promising, some analysts have reported a stagnation in sales. This could be down to a number of factors, though the most likely would be a combination of the slow release of new content and the difficulty in demoing VR products to mainstream gamers.

DATA STREAM → PS4 GLOBAL SALES HAVE HIT 53.4 MILLION UNITS SOLD AS OF THE END OF 2016

VR tracking device for peripherals, app-streaming services, new audio solutions and the capability for wireless virtual reality – all before the year's end. The biggest of these is no doubt the wireless adapter from TPCast; wires running down your back and coiling around your feet is the largest frustration (not to mention danger) to enjoying room-scale virtual environments and this device has the power to remove it entirely.

It isn't cheap, mind, costing $250; though that gets you 1.5 hours of battery life and the ability to view 2K video resolution at 90hz (with less than two milliseconds of transmission latency). It's impressive tech, essentially, and yet another demonstration that HTC is capable of pushing the potential of virtual reality further and further beyond our wildest imaginations.

It is also making VR, or at least the HTC Vive, look less like a gaming device and primed for something, well, *more*. Of the three headsets available, the Vive is the one that could have the biggest application in education and training, an area the company seems eager to capture in 2017. Game developers are clearly struggling to get mainstream players engaged, with *DayZ* creator Dean Hall even going as far as to claim that his studio's first VR games have been "very unprofitable" in a Reddit vent, later going on to flat out confirm: "There is no money in it," he wrote. "I don't mean 'money to go buy a Ferrari'. I mean 'money to make payroll'."

That's troubling news. Worse still, it has pushed companies such as Oculus to partially fund upcoming games in exchange for platform exclusivity (such is the case with *SuperHot VR*) in an attempt to keep the flow of new VR-ready games steady. Splitting the market through exclusivity is bad for consumers, especially with such new and niche technology, but it seems to be the only way developers will stand a chance of funding such interesting and risky projects. This will be a concern for HTC, of course, though an exciting new peripheral could ensure that the Vive takes on a life of its own outside of gaming. The Vive Tracker is a tool that will allow users to bring real-world accessories into their virtual worlds.

The super light tracker, weighing just under three ounces, connects to any device – such a tennis racket, plastic gun, or a firehose – and essentially enables motion-tracking for the accessory. While we can already see how this could be easily integrated into certain games, its application greatly surpasses that of interactive entertainment; this is something HTC has recognised directly, with the company already going as far as to demonstrate how this device could be used as a training tool in Major League Baseball and for future firefighters.

"To foster the long-term growth of VR, we want to make it even easier for developers to prototype and market more immersive controllers and accessories," Daniel O'Brien, HTC Vive GM, said in a statement. "The Vive Tracker is the first step in growing an ecosystem of third-party accessories that will change how we interact with virtual experiences and provide consumers and businesses with an unlimited amount of content opportunities."

Couple this new announcement with the replacement strap for HTC Vive, which fixes the headset's weakest component by replacing the audio component with improved headphones for improved 360-degree audio, and a subscription service designed to grow Viveport's marketplace with a steady stream of VR content, and it's beginning to look ever clearer that HTC is preparing to refine its focus.

For gamers, this isn't likely the news you are hoping to hear. Adoption rates of the hardware have been solid but slow, the rate of releases leaving many feeling cold; virtual reality is undoubtedly the most innovative and exciting thing to happen to videogames in a decade, but it's still finding its feet. For HTC, with so many practical opportunities in its immediate future, this might not be much of a concern, for Oculus and Sony – desperate to hold market superiority and to keep the games coming at a steady rate – Vive's rapid expansion, innovations and re-focus could kick-start an innovation arms race. 2017 is set to be a telling year for the future of VR.



Above Oculus and Sony are facing stiff competition from HTC. The Vive continues to impress in ways the other headsets couldn't dream of, and it's beginning to create a situation where the cost for getting the best experience is only getting greater and greater.

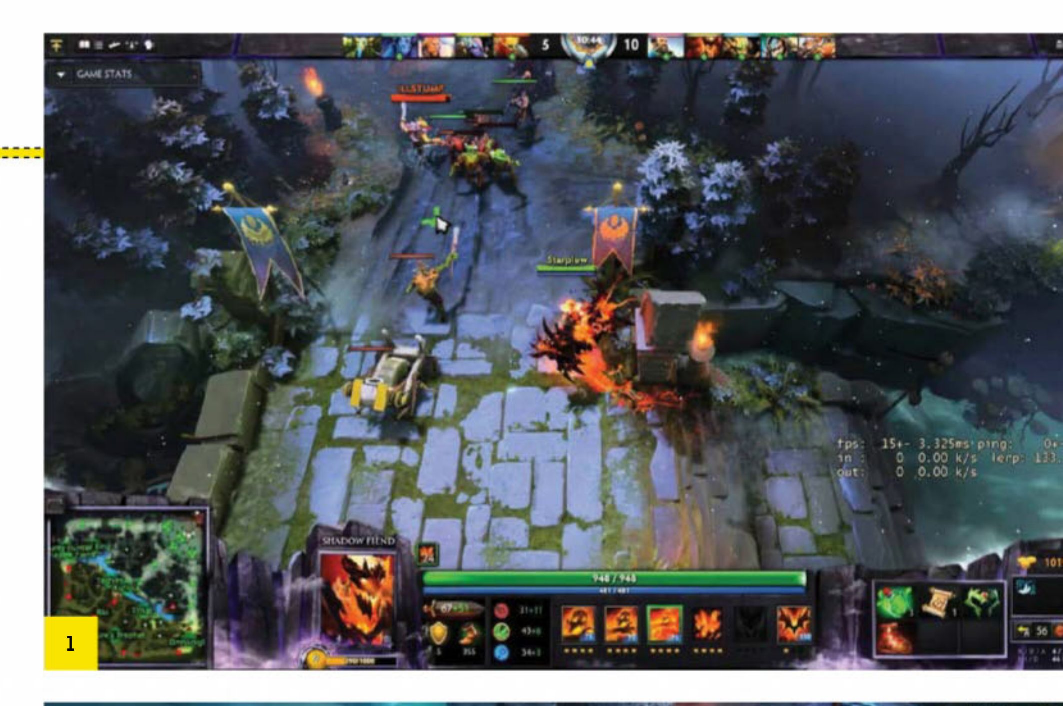
Why the Vive Tracker is such a game changer

→ Vive is bringing your entire world into VR

The ability to track real objects is, quite honestly, incredible. While we can only imagine the sort of simulation games this could inspire developers to create – imagine an FPS game where a life-sized gun is tracked accurately across the screen, down to your most intricate movements – its real, truly impressive application is going to come in the field of education. Imagine a tennis game where the digital re-creation of Andy Murray actually helps you improve your swing, racket in hand; or the ability for emergency services to help teach up and coming firefighters how to manage and operate expensive equipment in a virtual environment. Between the Tracker, and a suite of upgraded VR cameras and VR gloves (designed to accurately track 1:1 hand movements) the price and potential of HTC Vive continues to rise. While it might not be the most consumer-friendly VR headset on the market, HTC's behemoth is clearly the experience to own out of the trio of devices.



 **SUPER MARIO RUN HAD 90 MILLION DOWNLOADS, BUT ONLY 3 MILLION BOUGHT THE FULL GAME** 


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CAREFUL ITERATION

How the MOBA is evolving in 2017

→ The most popular game genre in the industry is looking to reinvent itself for the new year, bringing sweeping changes to the way in which you play and watch MOBAs in action

As expected, Multiplayer Online Battle Arena games are going to have another incredible year. With eSports on a seemingly unstoppable rise, the genre's premier games show no signs of dipping in popularity – if anything, they are only growing. That's impressive in and of itself; many of these games have been running for a decade (if not longer), while *League Of Legends* alone boasts a current server population of over 100 million monthly active players. The MOBA is in for one hell of a year and publishers are aware, with many of the genre's biggest titles undergoing serious revisions in preparation. Whether you're an existing fan, a lapsed player or a cautious observer standing on the Twitch sidelines, now is the time to choose your side and get involved.

DOTA 2

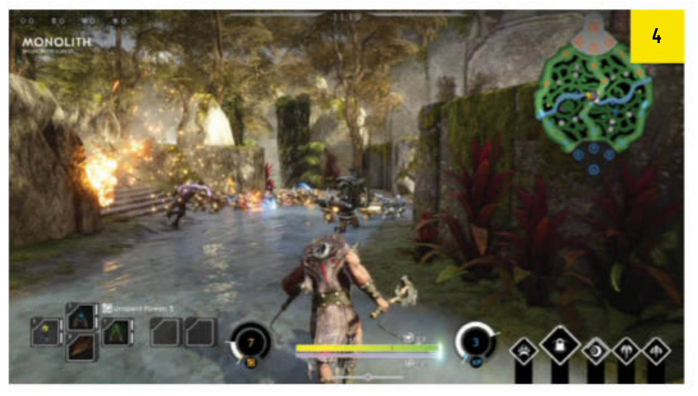
1 **Valve's *DOTA 2* just moved into version 7.00, but for all intents and purposes we should probably just call it *DOTA 3*.** The series has been in version '6-point-something' since 2005, with careful iteration between the numerous hands that have worked on the game steering it forward. But patch 7.00 is a huge update, essentially reinventing the basics of the game and bringing it into the modern era. It's thrilling to see *DOTA 2* looking so fresh and feeling so renewed; levelling stats have been replaced with a talent tree, Roshan (the all-powerful pit beast) has been relocated, the addition of seven Shrines bring a new structure to the moment-to-moment action, while Valve has also introduced a brand new character for the very first time – the first hero that wasn't ported from the original *DOTA*.

League Of Legends

2 **On the surface, it looks as if Riot has everything covered with *League Of Legends*.** The game continues to hold its server population, the company continues to introduce gameplay tweaks and patches, while new characters are still appearing at a steady rate. The LCS continues to run like clockwork – an area other publishers, such as Blizzard, are clearly envious of – though there are problems bubbling beneath the surface. *League Of Legends* continues to be a success story thanks (in large part) to the strength of its eSports. However organisations, sponsors and players are beginning to revolt against some of Riot's more concerning policies regarding contracts, team stability and monetary support. If Riot doesn't start listening to its pro players it could soon face big problems.

DATA STREAM → RHIANNA PRATCHETT HAS CONFIRMED SHE IS LEAVING THE TOMB RAIDER FRANCHISE


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Heroes Of The Storm

3 **Blizzard is known for careful iteration over sweeping changes with its titles and that's why we're expecting to see very little in the way of major disruption to *Heroes Of The Storm* in 2017.** The company is, of course, heavily focused on eSports for the new year, unveiling an all-new league structure in the form of the Heroes Global Championship, bringing major competitions in-house to make it easier for fans to follow along with the action at home. A new Open Division is designed to bridge the gap between professional play and top-tier amateur competitors, while the top eight teams from each region will look to be financially supported by Blizzard directly for merely making appearances – alongside the larger cash prizes for winning. Stability and support is the name of Blizzard's game this year.

Paragon

4 ***Paragon* is finally getting ready to play with the big boys.** Epic Games' free-to-play PS4 and PC MOBA has seen mild success thus far, though a huge update to the game has rejuvenated interest and server population. The Monolith update has completely replaced the single map available in the game, changed many of the basic rules, speeds of play, tweaked the library of characters and even introduced a huge rework to the card-based item system. All of this has come together to make *Paragon* a wholly more enjoyable experience; games are faster, the new Monolith map has better lines of sight and elevation, while the card system feels fair and balanced in a way that it wasn't before. *Paragon* is one of the most promising new MOBAs on the horizon and we can't wait to see how it evolves.

SMITE

5 ***Smite* is still a bit of an oddity.** While Hi-Rez has clearly put a lot of work and emphasis on getting *Smite* over to console, it hasn't quite taken off in the way we expected it to. Instead, the game continues to hold steady, with its player base and hardy group of competitive fans eager to see the ship stay stable. That can mean that *Smite* isn't as exciting, at times, as the comings and goings of the 'big three' but it also ensures a stable experience that's easier to get to grips with than jumping straight into *League* or *DOTA* for the first time. *Smite* is still the best beginner MOBA on the market, especially if you're console--bound, and that isn't likely to change in 2017. If you're looking to take your first steps into the chaos of multiplayer battle areas, make sure this is your first stop.

PLAYERS SPENT A RECORD BREAKING 3.9 BILLION HOURS ON XBOX LIVE IN 2016 SAYS MICROSOFT





DEATH BECOMES THEM

Scalebound joins the Xbox One graveyard

→ PlatinumGames' dragon-themed action adventure isn't the first to get the ruthless Microsoft axe

SCALEBOUND

1 Described by director Hideki Kamiya as unlike anything PlatinumGames had done before, and a massive challenge for the studio, it would appear Microsoft viewed it as a challenge too far. Platinum still has a great reputation, but its recent output has received a mixed critical reception. No details on why Microsoft cancelled its participation have been stated, although Phil Spencer, head of Xbox, responded to fans on Twitter saying, "We believe result is better 4 Xbox gamers, still disappointing." It's ambitious online co-op and monster hunting gameplay had looked promising.

FABLE LEGENDS

2 This one really stung, not least because it also saw the closure of Lionhead as a studio after years of restructuring, which left it in no shape to release anything other than *Fable Legends*, a game that Microsoft seemingly lost faith in after months of closed beta testing. By all accounts it had proven to be an expensive project to develop, and the post-release support it would need as a free-to-play online multiplayer game probably seemed daunting if it wasn't something everyone fully believed in. We can only hope the brand can be revived at some point by a new team.

PHANTOM DUST

3 Probably the strangest story of the Xbox One so far, this was a reboot of a classic Xbox game that hardly anyone was really expecting, or asking for, when it was announced at E3 2014 and then it was gone by February 2015. The word around town is that although Darkside had done a lot of work on the game, Microsoft kept changing its mind about what it wanted and that even the trailer was made by a separate team with no bearing on what had been produced. Microsoft says its still wants to make a new *Phantom Dust*, but is looking for a suitable new home for the project.

PROJECT KNOXVILLE

4 The loss of Press Play last year alongside Lionhead was another tough decision to take, not least because the team's output (*Max: The Curse Of Brotherhood*, Kalimba) had been excellent and it had recently closed a fan driven vote on what its next project would be. They had chosen *Knoxville*, a third-person multiplayer survival game that used a Horde mode style structure rather than a persistent world. It would have delivered shorter, sharper bursts of co-op or adversarial action like a modern *Left 4 Dead*. But, alas, it was lost with the closure of the studio.

Will they survive?

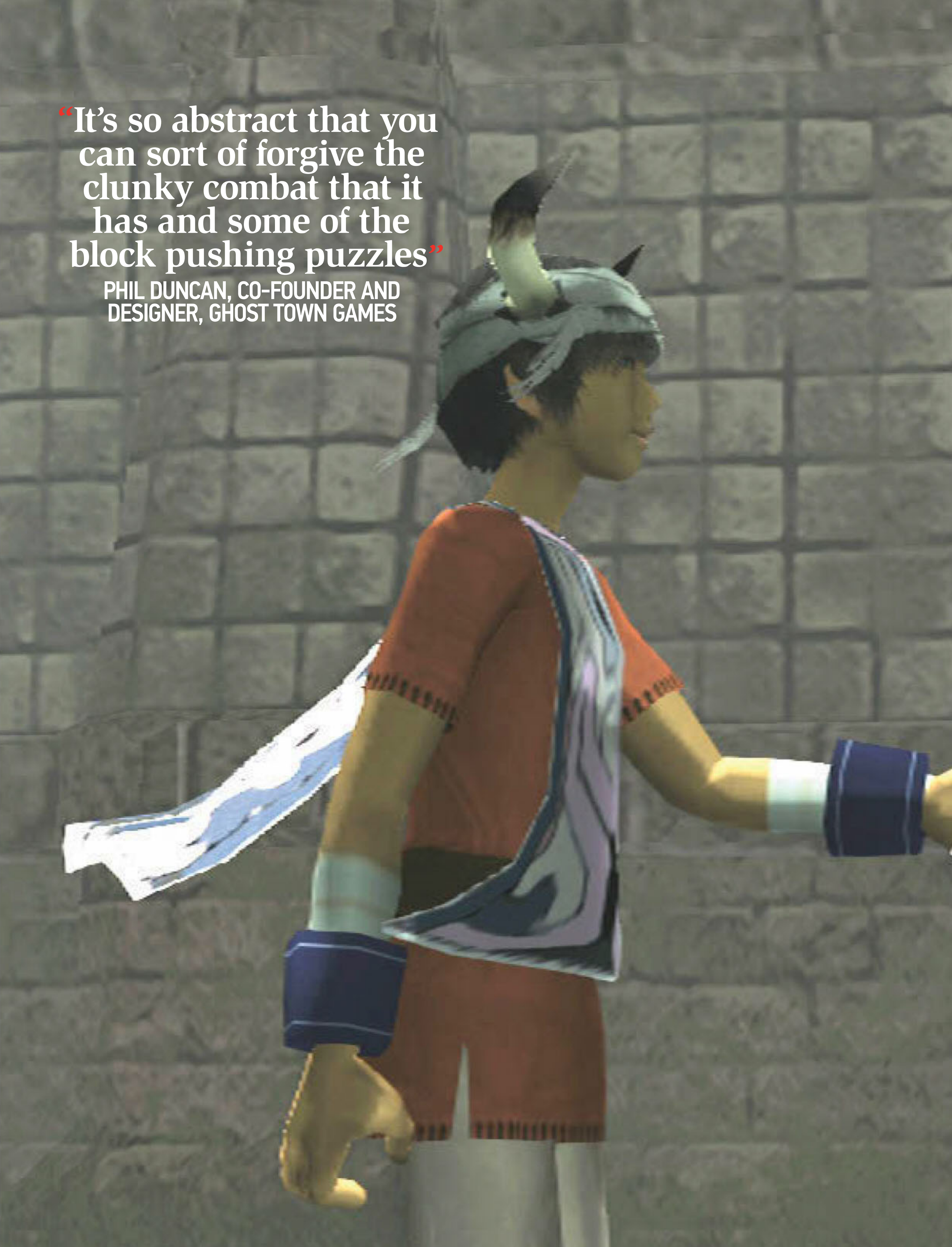
→ These games haven't been seen in a while either

CRACKDOWN 3
No word on this ambitious, cloud-powered action sandbox since its showcase at Gamescom in 2015, but Microsoft was quick to name check it as a 2017 release after Scalebound's cancellation. It could be a powerful Project Scorpio launch title.

BELOW
Back in August, Capybara announced it was delaying *Below* indefinitely, but we haven't taken that to mean it won't happen. Instead, we think the development team just got tired of setting dates and not being able to get the game to where it wanted to be in that time.

ION
From *DayZ* creator Dean Hall, through his new studio RocketWerkz and London-based Improbable, we've not heard much about this game since E3 2015, but even though Hall's team has been busy with other projects, there's no indication *Ion* has been dumped yet.

DATA STREAM → SUDA51'S LET IT DIE HAS BEEN DOWNLOADED OVER 1 MILLION TIMES SINCE LAUNCH



"It's so abstract that you can sort of forgive the clunky combat that it has and some of the block pushing puzzles"

PHIL DUNCAN, CO-FOUNDER AND DESIGNER, GHOST TOWN GAMES



WHY I ❤...

ICO

PHIL DUNCAN, CO-FOUNDER AND DESIGNER, GHOST TOWN GAMES

I replayed Ico recently and absolutely adored it. There's just something about the atmosphere of that game. As a designer I like the mechanics that are at play, but they're sort of hidden behind the world and it all just fits together so nicely. And it's so abstract that you can sort of forgive the clunky combat that it has and some of the block pushing puzzles. It just feels like such a nice world and it makes you question who you are in that world and what you're doing. I like the fact that it's open to interpretation.



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Prey

CONCEPT ■ Forget everything you thought you knew about *Prey* as Arkane wipes the slate clean and reboots the franchise. This is more than *Dishonored* set in space, it's an entirely new take on action-sims.

The hunter becomes the hunted

***Prey* is going to be the game *System Shock* fans have been waiting for.** A huge, complex undertaking for the studio behind *Dishonored*, *Prey* is whisking players away to Talos I, a space station orbiting the moon in 2032. It's here where you become the key subject in an experiment designed to alter humanity forever, but it's only as something goes horribly wrong (doesn't it always?) that you are thrust into a brutal life or death fight.

With the Sixties-inspired space station overrun with strange, hostile aliens, you will find yourself hunted, with whatever you can find aboard the station your only tools for survival against the Typhoon. This is a considered and expansive approach to science-fiction, with Arkane bringing player choice to the forefront of the experience to create something truly unique for each and every player that dares engage in such a creepy and challenging adventure.

INFORMATION

Details

Format: Xbox One, PS4, PC
Origin: USA
Publisher: Bethesda Softworks
Developer: Arkane Studios
Release: 2017
Players: 1

Developer Profile

Formed in 1999, Arkane Studios has spent many years learning from the best in the business. After stints working with Valve in secret and providing assistance on *BioShock 2*'s level design, the studio made a name for itself with the release of *Dishonored*.

High Point

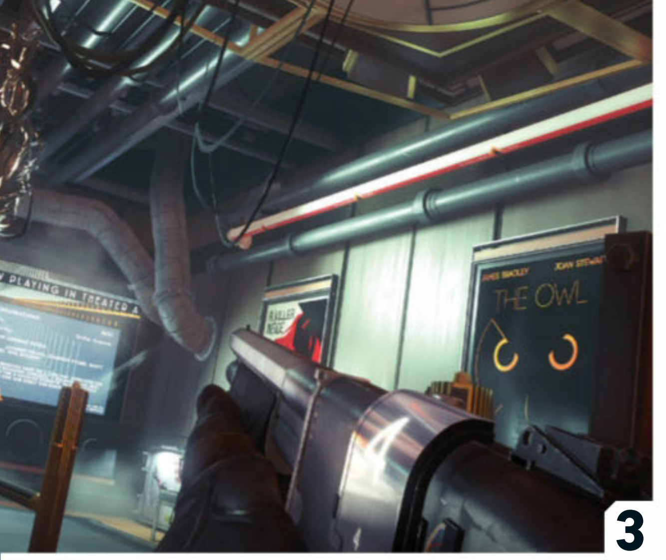
Dishonored is a classic of the last generation. It effortlessly filled the gap *Thief* had left in the hearts of many stealth fans, proving the studio has what it takes to compete with the very best in the industry.

Developer History

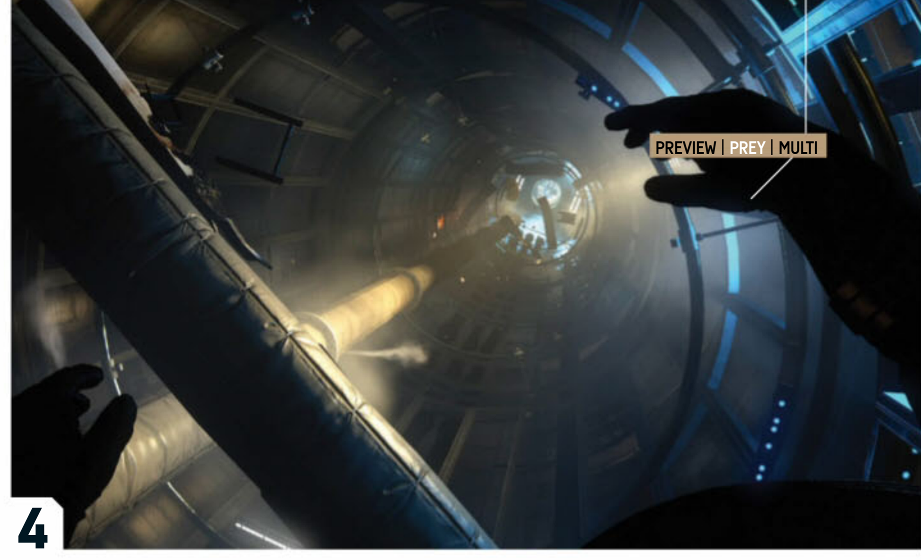
Arx Fatalis **2002 [PC, Xbox]**
Dark Messiah Of Might And Magic **2006 [Xbox 360, PC]**
Dishonored **2012 [Multi]**
Dishonored 2 **2016 [Multi]**

1 IT'S FIRST-PERSON, BUT IT ISN'T A SHOOTER

Don't assume that *Prey* is an FPS – at least, not in the traditional sense. Much like the *Dishonored* series, *Prey* has been designed in such a way that stealth is the standard but the array of supernatural powers and heavy-duty weapons to be found in the game world will let you build your own preferred play-style. Lean towards action, double-down on stealth or run a blend build of the two as you look to uncover the mysteries of Talos I and the strange extraterrestrial experiments performed on the citizens onboard.



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“Nothing is as it seems aboard Talos I. As Morgan Yu, sets out to unravel the clues you’ve left behind for yourself, and discover the truth about your past. What role will you play in TranStar’s plans and the mysterious threat ravaging the station?”

BETHESDA PRESS RELEASE

2 DILIGENT DECISION-MAKING WILL DEFINE YOUR GAME

If *Dishonored* was the spiritual successor to *Thief*, then *Prey* is the direct descendant of *System Shock*. Combat is slow and deliberate, while the atmosphere is tense – it also happens to have a wrench. But there are twists to come, and Arkane is promising that everything you do will build towards the end state of the game in some way. For example, there are other survivors to be found on Talos I and whether you aid or abandon, kill or incapacitate them will have a real impact on your progression and eventual success or failure.

3 IT FEATURES A DEEP AND PROGRESSIVE UPGRADE SYSTEM

The progression and crafting systems of *Prey* are far more robust and versatile than those of *Dishonored 2*, with a stronger focus on character builds. Should you enjoy sticking needles and serums in your eyes – and want to enjoy *Prey*’s sweet blend of offensive action – you’ll want to spec in improving enemy Typhoon powers, such as Kinetic Blast, which creates a physical blast that radiates outwards from your person. If you favour stealth instead, you might instead want to pour points into upgrading critical damage or the strength of your wrench to help you take out enemies swiftly from the shadows.

4 PREY IS ESSENTIALLY ONE HUGE MISSION

While the *Dishonored* games featured self-contained areas, *Prey* is essentially one huge adventure where everything is linked. In classic Metroidvania style, some areas might be blocked off or require certain items to progress (not too dissimilar to the navigation model used in *BioShock*), but backtracking is always encouraged as you spend more time on the sprawling space station. History, progression and the ending is actively created in your personal playthrough, with the way in which you encounter elements all ultimately building a unique, nightmarish experience.

5 THERE ARE MULTIPLE WAYS TO PROGRESS

You’ve arrived at a locked door and don’t have the code – what do you do? Most games would have you running off in search of the digits, but not here. While that is an option, Arkane is just as happy for you to craft an EMP bomb – any item can be created via a Fabricator, so long as you have the resources and blueprints – and blast your way in. You could attempt to bypass the door entirely by jettisoning out into zero-G areas, or you could transform yourself into a coffee cup using the enemy Mimic power and simply roll on through the small security window.

Right: Animals can be discovered throughout the world and will come to your aid, though our favourite is certainly this adorable fox. Below: *Rime* will be a largely combat-free game, with the young protagonist using the environment and navigating between areas to escape instances of peril



SPRAWLING ISLAND

RIME IS AN open-world adventure in the truest sense. The entirety of the island is accessible from the outset, but not to be understood until you progress further through the game. The more mysteries you uncover, the better you will be able to solve some of the game's tougher puzzles, navigate around some of the tougher enemies and begin to understand the truth behind the crumbling civilisation you have found yourself immersed in. While the primary focus of *Rime* is to escape the island itself, there will be a hefty dose of environmental storytelling to sift through, as crumbling ruins, statues and signals all point to a colossal disaster on this idyllic isle.

Above: Solar and lunar cycles are clearly a big part of the central puzzle system in *Rime*, with certain shrines located across the isle granting the ability to warp time around you. Right: *Rime* will include elements of light platforming, though it still isn't clear whether this will be governed by a stamina system to induce challenge.

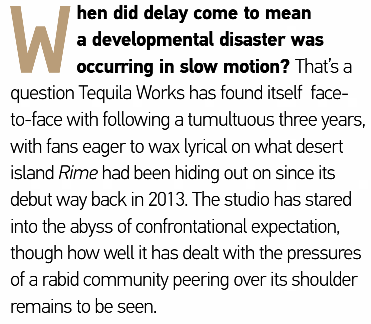




Rime

CONCEPT ■ *Rime* is a single-player puzzle adventure game focused around the pursuits of a shipwrecked boy trying to escape a mysterious island following a torrential storm

Emerging from the shadows



When did delay come to mean a developmental disaster was occurring in slow motion? That's a question Tequila Works has found itself face-to-face with following a tumultuous three years, with fans eager to wax lyrical on what desert island *Rime* had been hiding out on since its debut way back in 2013. The studio has stared into the abyss of confrontational expectation, though how well it has dealt with the pressures of a rabid community peering over its shoulder remains to be seen.

Rime has, as you have probably guessed, re-emerged from its self-imposed exile. It has shed its Sony exclusive status and will now be making its way to the Xbox One, Nintendo Switch and PlayStation 4 later this May, though we are only just starting to peel back the layers on this mysterious adventure (let alone the circumstances that has led to it going multiplatform).

While many of you might have had your curiosity piqued by the likes of *The Witness* and *The Last Guardian* in the intervening years, there's still plenty to get excited by. At its core, *Rime* is an open-world puzzle adventure, strewn across an island of lush watercolour environments; encounter its colossal structures, solve the puzzles, rid yourself of a curse and escape the islands, though we imagine this is easier said than done. If, for some reason, that doesn't get you interested, *Rime* also happens to feature an adorable fox that guides you between areas of interest – what more could you possibly want?

Okay, so a little more, we imagine. If there's anything that can be said about *Rime* it's that the scale of the world certainly looks impressive. Playing as a young boy, the environment seems to creep around you; structures loom over the horizon and the world looks to be as much of an enemy as many of the mechanical and feral creatures we've only yet glimpsed at so far.

Back in 2013, there were rumours that *Rime* had featured heavy instances of combat and tower-defence mechanics, all of which seems to have been exorcised entirely. *Rime* is a largely combat-free game, with puzzle solving, exploration and light platforming taking precedence. Stonework animals you encounter can be brought back to life and coaxed into creating mythical structures and staircases – no doubt integral for climbing higher up the central tower – while lateral thinking puzzles seem to be sprinkled all throughout the world; we have a feeling *The Witness* players will be in their element here.

Interestingly, Tequila Works has built in a full day/night cycle into the game that isn't just used for showing off the impressive lighting system it has employed in this cel-shaded fantasy, but it's actually an integral part to much of the gameplay. Some puzzles can only be solved in specific time zones – such as using moonlight to highlight solutions otherwise masked by sun splash – and certain actions will even let you manipulate the status quo through object pushing and pulling.

It can be all too easy to point to *Rime's* obvious influences – *The Legend Of Zelda*, *ICO* and *The Last Guardian* – as a way of explaining away some of the mysteries behind this understated gaming experience, but that would be doing it a disservice. If there's anything we should have all learned from the *No Man's Sky* debacle, it's that indie projects simply don't have the personnel or budget to compete in a similar league, and doing so will only raise expectations beyond that of a reasonable degree. While the visual identifiers are certainly there to invite comparison, *Rime* has the potential to stand on its own two feet. Damn the delays and damn the distance Tequila Works has instigated, perhaps that gap between announcement and release is exactly what *Rime* needed to truly perfect its mechanics and systems; the studio has spent the better part of two years refining *Rime* into the game coming this May, and it has enough intrigue behind its beautiful art style and intuitive puzzle design that every fan of exploratory puzzle games should be eagerly awaiting a deeper dive into the mysteries of the island.

> "Players must use their wits to decipher the challenges and secrets of an expansive world strewn with rugged terrain, wild creatures and the crumbling ruins of a long-forgotten civilisation"
>
> TEQUILA WORKS PRESS RELEASE

INFORMATION

Details

Format:
Xbox One, PS4, Switch
Origin:
Spain
Publisher:
Grey Box and Six Foot
Developer:
Tequila Works
Release:
May 2017
Players:
1

Developer Profile

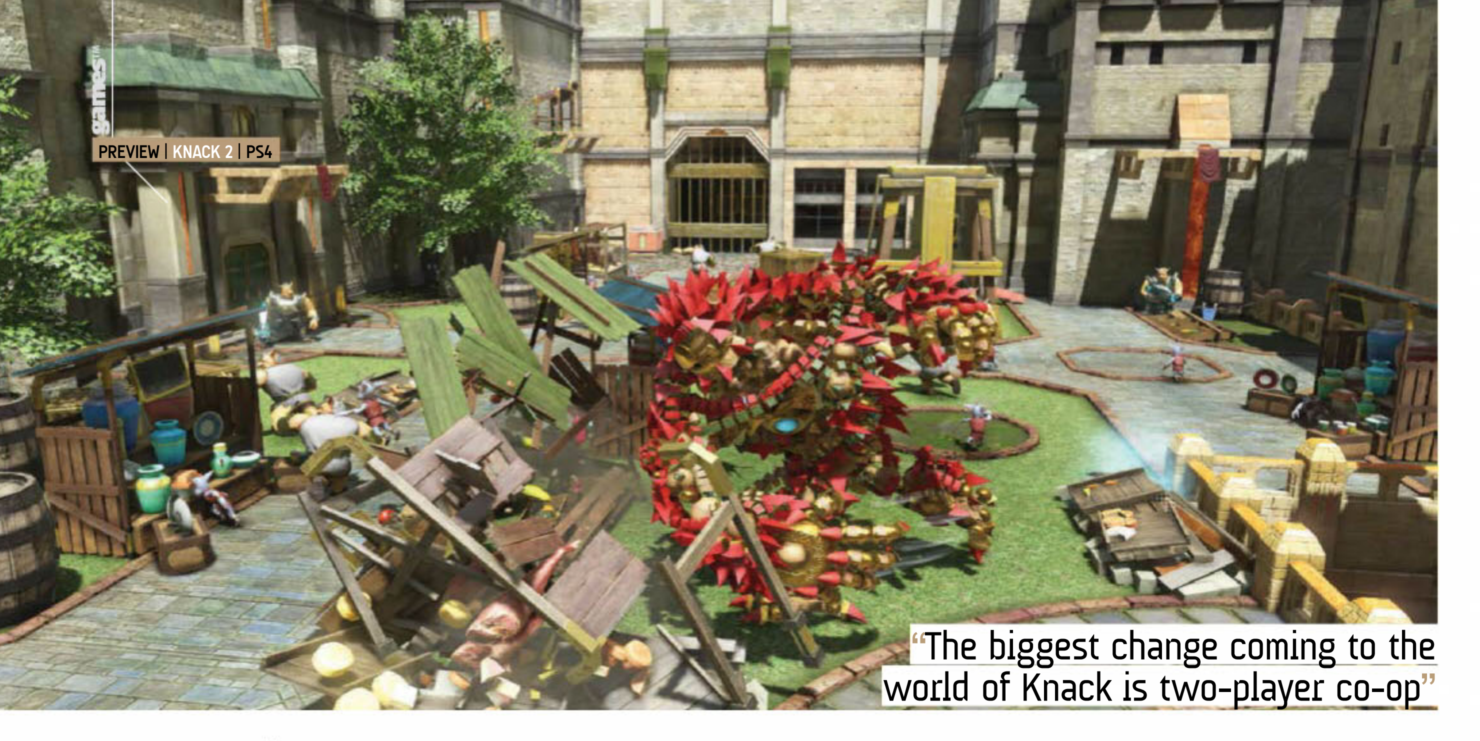
Formed in 2009 by former employees of Blizzard Entertainment, MercurySteam and Sony Computer Entertainment, Tequila Works has been slowly and diligently creating independent games out of Madrid, Spain. *Deadlight*, released in 2012, was the studio's first game, though it is yet to follow that up with anything.

Developer History

Deadlight **2012 [Multi]**

High Point

Deadlight was a surprise XBLA hit back in 2012, impressing with its grim aesthetic, intuitive controls and interesting approach to puzzle-based levels.



"The biggest change coming to the world of Knack is two-player co-op"

Knack 2

CONCEPT ■ A direct sequel to the 2013 original, *Knack 2*'s linear 3D platforming and combat returns with a greater emphasis on exploration and two-player co-op.

The sequel nobody wanted might actually be worth playing

While it might be fashionable to actively dislike the launch game disappointment that was Knack, the Mark Cerny-directed 3D platformer certainly had plenty of problems that few gamers or critics could defend. And while the announcement of a sequel at PSX 2016 was hardly the highlight of the show, the PS4 exclusive is still looking to right many of its painful wrongs and offer a game that *could* (fistfuls of salt at the ready) be a lot fun to play.

The biggest change coming to the world of *Knack* is two-player co-op, adding a second blue-coloured monster made of bits to the mix. The doubling of the player count isn't just there for the sake of being different, either – Sony Japan Studio is shooting for a more classic arcade feel by encouraging players to attack each other as well as the enemies they encounter.

Rather than promoting trolling, the idea is hitting your partner with an attack will turn them into a weapon against *Knack 2*'s rogue gallery of enemies. Striking your mate from the front with a regular attack will shoot projectiles from their back (turning them into a living gatling gun if you string enough punches together), while leaping into the air and catching them with a slam move will cause said pal to explode. Think of it as consensual griefing.

The studio has also addressed a lot of those basic problems that made playing the original *Knack* more of a war of attrition than a memorable experience. Checkpoints, which were previously so spartan they made 20-minute retreads of the same sections a regular occurrence, have now been spread evenly across levels.

Health is no longer a limited resource and now regenerates over time, while any co-op partners dispatched during combat will respawn nearby in a few moments to ensure you're not overwhelmed. And while that combat should still offer a challenge (expect plenty of big and small foes to smash to bits on your travels), you now have access to a larger skill tree with enough upgrades to make even the biggest of *Knack* detractors flex with power.

Thankfully, combat doesn't have quite the chokehold in *Knack 2* as it did in the first game, with a far greater emphasis on platforming and exploration. And while the whole experience still feels linear in design, all these little tweaks could finally be opening up *Knack*'s potential. There's a clear shift towards the 3D platforming qualities of old, and considering returning director Mark Cerny's direct involvement in such stalwarts as *Spyro The Dragon* and *Jak And Daxter*, the sequel no one seemingly wanted could end up serving up a few slices of humble pie.

INFORMATION

Details

Format: PS4
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Sony
Developer: Sony Japan Studio
Release: 2017
Players: 1-2

Developer Profile

Formed in 1993, Sony Japan Studio (or SIE Japan Studio) has been involved in some of PlayStation's most memorable exclusives, including the *Ape Escape* games and *LocoRoco*. It's also made a career of collaborating with other Japanese studios, including Team Ico, FromSoftware and Level-5.

Developer History

Ape Escape **1999 [PS1]**
Shadow Of The Colossus **2005 [PS2]**
Puppeteer **2013 [PS3]**
Bloodborne **2015 [PS4]**

High Point

Bloodborne remains the most impressive outing the studio has collaborated on, but as a solo developer, *Ape Escape 2* (which arrived in Japan on PS2 in 2002) stands as its most impressive platforming property.



■ The new and improved skill tree offers plenty of new skills and upgrades to give your Knack a boost, especially when you're in the thick of combat.





Gigantic

CONCEPT ■ *Gigantic* is a free-to-play MOBA designed specifically around the limitations of the controller. Team-based action combat breaks away from traditional MOBA form to create something faster and more immediate.

A new breed of monster

G*igantic* is going to be the first game to directly benefit from the release, and subsequent success, of Blizzard's *Overwatch* and Hi-Rez Studios' *Paladins*. Both of those games are built on a now-familiar foundation: team-based action converging with likeable, loveable hero characters, though *Gigantic* veers from the path in one notable way. It's a MOBA; while that's a genre with enough baggage to make many of you roll your eyes and turn away without a second thought, that would be doing both developer Motiga and yourself a huge disservice. Many MOBAs – like *League Of Legends*, *DOTA 2* and *Heroes Of The Storm* – have a reputation based wholly around hostility and difficulty, although the same can't be said for *Gigantic* – that much is clear after even just a handful of hours with the open beta on Xbox One.

Pour even more time into it, however, and the reasoning for this being the case becomes even clearer; it's just so much damned fun to be inclusive. At its most basic level, *Gigantic* already shows a great deal of potential. It can succeed where so many others have failed, thanks largely to an understanding of the problems that have plagued console-bound MOBAs that have preceded it. While *SMITE* and *Paragon* have done fairly admirably to bind traditional genre conventions to the limited controller layout, these titles have had a tendency to feel 'MOBA-lite'. Inevitably, with so many concessions being made to console players, a piece of the MOBA soul is lost in translation, the meta subdued or the pace of the action dampened as a result.

Gigantic is still figuring out its meta – that will take months to solidify – but what's currently playable certainly shows a ton to get excited about. It's funny, as in many ways *Gigantic* is actually delivering where Gearbox's *Battleborn* so famously failed. It's a fun and frantic five-versus-five action experience, guiding you along clear, immediate pathways to come into contact with other players, wrapped up in a visually appealing and evocatively unique colour-splashed graphical style. But where *Battleborn* lacked focus, *Gigantic* knows exactly what it's trying to be.

Each of the heroes feel storied and unique within their own physics-based abilities and styles of combat. This extends past the typical 'this is the mage' and 'this is brawler' format of design, with each offering depth that is only found through hours of investigating each hero's particular quirks and nuances. Perhaps it helps that *Gigantic* has you on a constant offensive strike, less concerned with pushing you to take and defend locations on a map and more interested in having you romp around large arenas alongside your faction's very own 100-foot monster. Ensuring yours isn't the first to fall is the main objective.

These Guardians are the biggest and most obvious deviation from MOBA convention. While they spend time sat on opposite ends of the map, they actually wade into battle themselves as your team builds up kills and experience, powering up your Guardian's attack meter before they rampage into combat and attack their counterpart. It's visually evocative and stunning to be a part of, a constant push and pull as both teams rush to defend their own Guardian in combat and swarm to attack the opposition's. Couple that with Motiga's excellent map design, super-tight controls and impressively tight action-combat, and you'll find that *Gigantic* is doing just about enough to position itself favourably in the crosshairs of both the *Overwatch* and *SMITE* crowds.

This has been the way with *Gigantic* for many years now, with the game showing as much promise as the first time it was demoed back in 2014. What we need to see now is some major progress towards a full release. While the studio has some work to do with the UI and map-point objective clarity (at least from a visual identity standpoint) the rest of *Gigantic* feels exhilarating enough that its stint in Game Preview should be a short one.

> "Gigantic is an entirely new action MOBA experience that combines high twitch skills and deep strategic choices… Gigantic is way beyond Overwatch or Paladins"
>
> CHRIS CHUNG CEO OF MOTIGA

INFORMATION

Details

Format: Xbox One, PC
Origin: USA
Publisher: Perfect World Entertainment
Developer: Motiga
Release: TBC 2017
Players: 1-10

Developer Profile

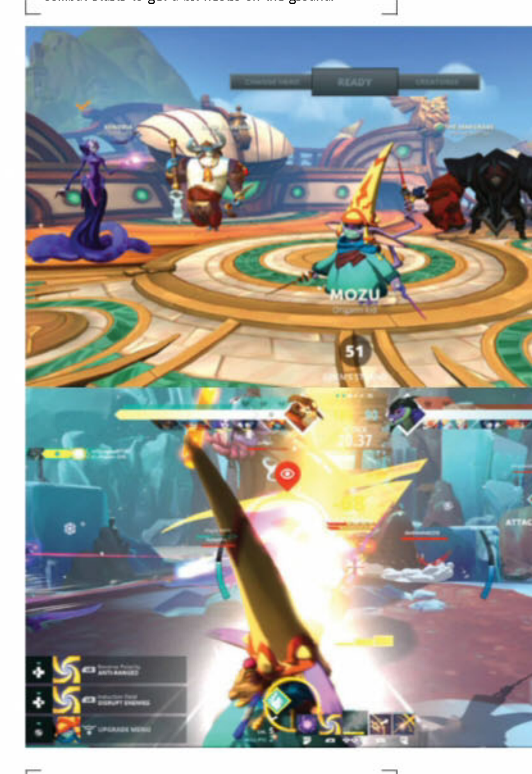
Founded in 2010, Motiga was started by Chris Chung (ex-Trion Worlds) and Rick Lambright (ex-Starwave) in an attempt to build a game company that would be first and foremost focused around building and servicing a community of gamers. The studio's first project, *Gigantic*, has been in production since 2012.

High Point

Motiga has yet to really prove itself as a developer, but getting *Gigantic* into open beta following a round of layoffs early in 2016 shows a real drive to get this product out and onto the market as intended.



■ Above: One thing we were impressed with is how easy it is to track and manage enemies, even when combat starts to get a bit hectic on the ground.



■ Above: *Gigantic* will be free-to-play when it launches on Xbox One and Windows 10 in 2017, with the game supported by an array of in-game purchasable items. These seem to be being handled well enough, with extra heroes being the key item worth getting.
Right: It's pretty awesome seeing your Guardian swoop into combat to battle its rival – all you are able to do is dance around its feet and try to assist it.





1 OVER THE SHOULDER

■ *Gigantic* plays, in many respects, like a traditional third-person action game, with the camera sitting behind your unique hero's shoulder and the combat and movement bound to the controller in a way that feels comfortable and responsive.

2 ATTACK BARS

■ The faster your team levels up and kills enemy heroes, the faster your gigantic Guardian's attack bar will fill up. Doing so spurs them into action, and it isn't long before screen-dwarfing monsters are duking it out around you.

3 LEVELLING UP

■ As you get kills and assists you'll begin to level up, with *Gigantic* making it quick and easy to assign skills and abilities throughout games. With two talent trees it's easy to tailor your hero, even in the middle of combat.

4 MAP NAVIGATION

■ While the game has a clearly beautiful art style and the map design is interesting and elevated, visual navigation could be better. The mini-map isn't overly helpful, so it would be great to see some of the sight lines cleared ahead of release.



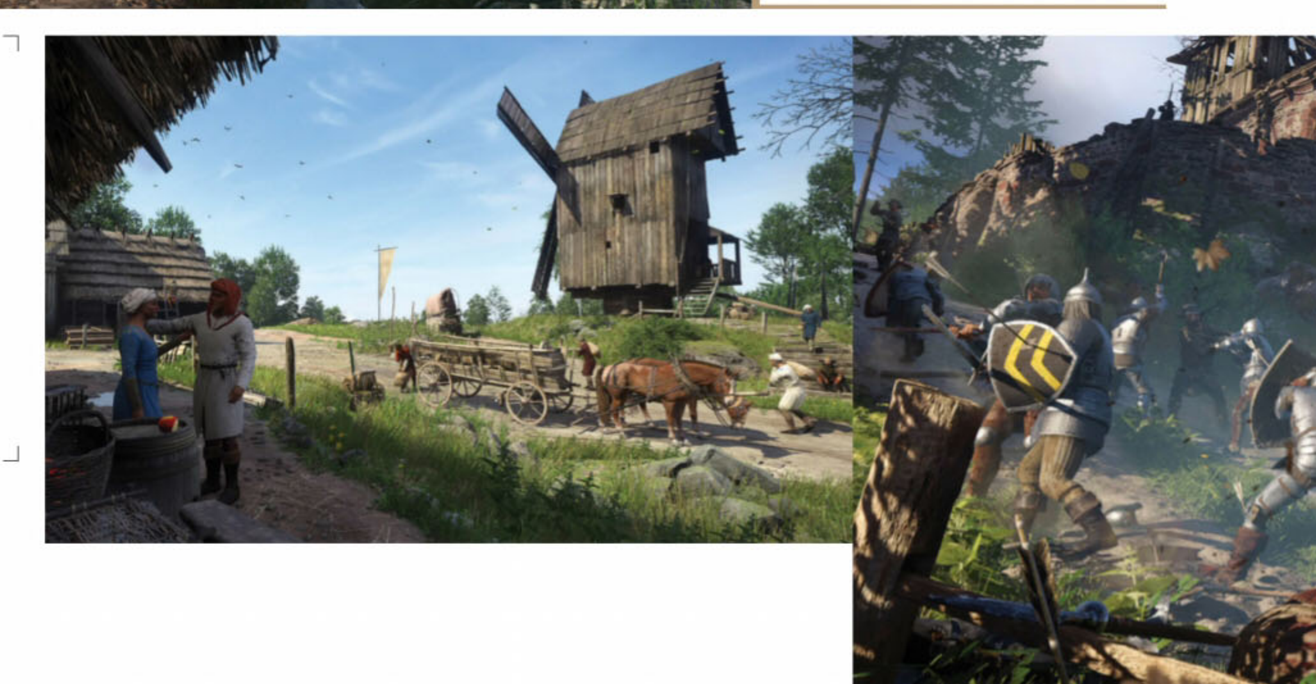
As the war spreads you'll get the chance to offer your services to your native military and can specialise as a swordsman, archer or anything else you want to.



CAN YOU EVEN READ?

ONE OF THE many fun decisions that Warhorse has made with regards to different skill sets is your ability to read. You'll actually start the game illiterate and you'll need to invest in some schooling in order to make any sense of books, scrolls or signs you might see in the game. Pick up a book and it will just be gibberish letters on a page at first. Get your reading skill up to 50 per cent and about half the words will make sense to you, but the rest will be a mess. It's a fantastic example of just how meticulous this team is being about its skill trees and how realistically it's attempt to depict 15th Century Bohemia.

Above: As the story of *Kingdom Come* unfolds you will be forced to leave your home and find your fortune elsewhere in the country. But with war on your borders, it probably won't take long for you to be sucked into the conflict.
Right: Since this is based on a real location and actual historical events, great pains have been taken to make sure the architecture and geography of the game is as close to reality as can be.



Kingdom Come: Deliverance

CONCEPT ■ It's a time of war in the Kingdom of Bohemia and the son of a blacksmith is caught in the middle. How you choose to progress in this world is up to you.

Enjoying a Bohemian lifestyle

So, remember all those conversations you would have with friends about how awesome an RPG that had real-world levels of threat and tedium would be, but how you thought it might actually be a stupid idea. Warhorse didn't think it was, and *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* is looking like proof that it wasn't a stupid idea either.

We've been tracking the development of this medieval simulation for some years now as development on the game has gradually moved forward and we're now very close to seeing it completed. The core concept of a game where you play as a fairly average (if not somewhat below average) subject of the Kingdom of Bohemia in a time of war, finding your way through a military and forging a path of revenge against awesome odds has remained constant from the start. Sword combat is based on real techniques and the real consequences of damage. Skills are specialised and based on practice and real skill on the part of the player. Comparisons have been made with *Dark Souls*, but this is something different entirely. This is a game with all of the trappings and systems of a fantasy-RPG, but with all the fantasy stripped right out of it and a bucket load of harsh reality put in its place.

Let's talk about sword combat first, because it's one of the most meticulously developed elements of the game. If you have been impressed with *For Honor*'s sword fighting system, then this one makes it look like *Splatoon* to *Kingdom Come*'s *Battlefield 1*. *Deliverance* uses a six-point stance system where you must match, block, parry and thrust at your opponent. One-on-one fights are tough and tense as you look for an opening and protect yourself. Without armour on, taking a hit to a limb can put you close to death, a blow to the head or chest instantly fatal. Even in armour, you only get a little more protection and weaknesses can always be found.

It's not just swords either, as axes, bows, spears and maces can also be used in the game. Mastering these weapons is all a question of use, too. There is no single-hand combat stat to level up, but rather a specific skill level for each weapon type and getting better at it involves actually using it, not just applying points to it. Likewise, a number of other abilities need to be practiced or taught to you in order to get better at them. This puts all of your progress down to your own skill and timing with a gamepad or keyboard and mouse. And it even extends to you ability to handle your alcohol in the game and persuade people in conversations – it's all down to practice.

The wider world systems of the game are also impressive, offering lots of opportunities for emergent solutions to missions as well as building your reputation in different communities in the game. Offer local merchants a fair price on trading goods and they may be more willing to trade in the future, perhaps even spreading the word of your generosity to others. Beat up a particularly disliked guard and the locals might offer you more support as you pass through a town. Likewise, if you get caught stealing items, messing with locals and generally being a pain in the backside, your reputation locally will decline and could even pass on to other nearby villages. Everything is reactive to your behaviour and decisions.

> "We're humbled by the outpouring of support, and admittedly a bit shellshocked. We can't thank our supporters enough. We are prepared to give everything we have to make an unforgettable game"
>
> DAN VÁVRA WARHORSE STUDIOS

How all of this is going to tie into a broader system and narrative for the whole game is something we'll need to remain patient about seeing. Warhorse doesn't want to spoil too much about its story, although the locations and conflicts depicted are based on real events from history. At present what we've seen is a punishing RPG, meticulous in its construction and promising a great deal. With a little additional polish it could be something very impressive indeed.

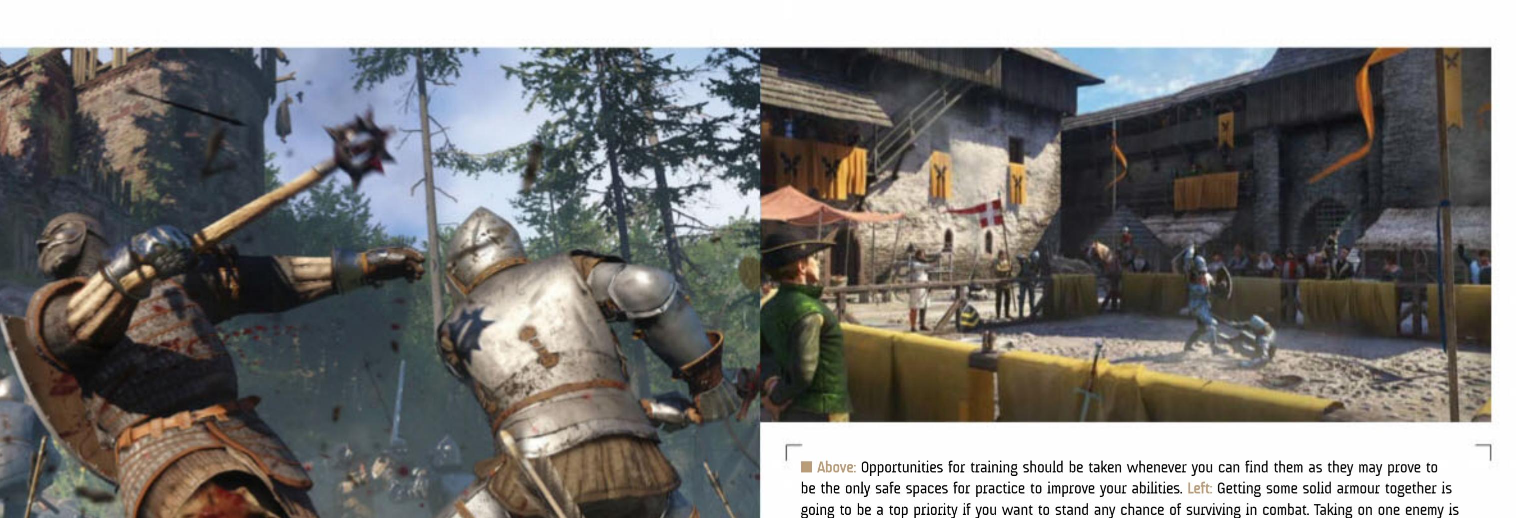
INFORMATION

Details

Format: PS4, Xbox One, PC
Origin: Czech Republic
Publisher: Deep Silver
Developer: Warhorse Studios
Release: TBC 2017
Players: 1

Developer Profile

Founded by former writer and game designer from 2K Czech, Daniel Vávra, and Martin Klíma, a producer who worked at Altar Games, Codemasters and Bohemia Interactive, the team was founded in 2011 but *Kingdom Come* is its first title. The pitch for the game was apparently what helped to form the studio in the first place.



■ Above: Opportunities for training should be taken whenever you can find them as they may prove to be the only safe spaces for practice to improve your abilities. Left: Getting some solid armour together is going to be a top priority if you want to stand any chance of surviving in combat. Taking on one enemy is survivable, but two or more could lead to a very swift death.



■ Below: The focus is back on fighter jets, with most of the other flying vehicles featured in previous *Ace Combat* instalments being removed in favour of a core experience.



INFORMATION

Details

Format: PS4
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Bandai Namco Entertainment
Developer: Project Aces
Release: TBC 2017
Players: TBC

Developer Profile

Formed in 2001 as an internal studio under the Bandai Namco umbrella, Project Aces is dedicated to both leading and assisting in the creation of all things *Ace Combat*. The studio is led by long-serving director and producer Kazutoki Kono – a veteran of the company for 20 years.

Developer History

Ace Combat 04: Shattered Skies **2001 [PS2]**
Ace Combat 5: The Unsung War **2005 [PS2]**
Ace Combat: Assault Horizon **2011 [Multi]**

High Point

Ace Combat 6: Fires Of Liberation was proof that an engaging and exciting story could be married with exciting and thrilling aerial combat, something we hope to see replicated here.

Ace Combat 7

CONCEPT ■ *Ace Combat* makes its debut on the eighth generation of consoles, as the flight sim comes exclusively to PlayStation 4 with PSVR support – a first for the franchise.

Take to the skies like never before

It can be testing to summon the energy for yet another high-octane assault on the skyline after 25 years and 18 instalments of Ace Combat. But there's something particularly inviting about Project Aces' latest combat flight simulator, coming exclusively to PlayStation 4 in 2017 alongside PlayStation VR support.

In many respects, this is a back-to-basics approach for *Ace Combat* as helicopters and Piston Fighters are left in the hangar in favour of focusing exclusively on jet aircraft flight and combat. But then, in so many other ways, this looks to be a major overhaul as Project Aces takes full advantage of the PS4 – and Unreal Engine 4 – to make improvements across the board. Strategic play is to be greatly improved, with players able to manually perform advanced manoeuvres, while clouds will actually impact combat as pilots are able to use the drifting cover to hamper enemy visibility and mask aerial assaults – well, as much as it possible when flying a bloody huge fighter jet, anyway.

However the biggest revolution, of course, comes in the form of PSVR support. While optional, it looks like it might be the ultimate way to play and enjoy *Ace Combat 7*. Running at a smooth 60 frames-per second, you'll be able to hop into the cockpit of your fighter and truly take to the skies, using a look-to-lock missile system that seems to be inspired by the fine work in CCP's *EVE Valkyrie*. You'll have full control over the controls in the cockpit, making this surely the most immersive *Ace Combat* yet. Given that producer Katsuhiro Harada once famously stamped out the idea of an *Ace Combat* VR game back in 2014 – likening the experience to being "shaken violently" to create a feeling of inertia that mimicked that of being drunk – it's certainly a surprise to see it being included here. Whether the studio is able to truly exorcise motion sickness when moving at such breakneck speeds remains to be seen, though we're certainly excited to see Project Aces try.

> "Leveraging the trueSKYTM technology and developed utilizing Unreal Engine 4, Ace Combat 7 will astound players with beautifully rendered skies and highly detailed cityscapes"
>
> PRESS RELEASE BANDAI NAMCO

For long-term players of *Ace Combat* the only sticking point might come by way of the campaign. As a direct follow up to *Ace Combat 6*, following some of the finer plot points might be a little difficult for some of you PS-faithful, considering *Fires Of Liberation* was an Xbox 360 exclusive. This is a shame, as Project Aces is clearly putting a lot of work and time into bringing the drama and tension of the pilot's life to the fore. Ultimately, this is one 2017 release to keep a look out for if you're looking for a different flavour of game; fast, challenging and visually impressive, *Ace Combat 7* is going to be proof that flight sims still have a place in the current generation.



INFORMATION

Details

Format: PS4, Xbox One PC
Origin: Poland
Publisher: CI Games
Developer: In-house
Release: 4 April 2017
Players: 1

Developer Profile

The Warsaw-based developer and publisher has been involved in dozens of projects since its formation in 2002, but its most prominent releases have definitely been the *Sniper: Ghost Warrior* series and, most recently, *Lords Of The Fallen*. It now has more offices in Poland, Romania, Germany, USA and the UK.

Developer History

Sniper: Ghost Warrior **2010 [Multi]**
Sniper: Ghost Warrior 2 **2013 [Multi]**
Enemy Front **2014 [Multi]**
Lords Of The Fallen **2014 [Multi]**

High Point

Lords Of The Fallen was a big change of direction for CI Games, with former CD Projekt Red senior producer Tomek Gop heading up the game as executive producer. It's one of the best reviewed games in the company's history.

Sniper: Ghost Warrior 3

CONCEPT ■ The *Sniper* series moves to Georgia for an open-world outing where civil war is being used to cover up a darker purpose.

■ Above: Graphically we're very impressed with what CI Games has done with this sequel. It's one of its best-looking releases.

Expanding your crawl space

We thought we were doing rather well until we stepped out on a dirt track, triumphantly striding towards our jeep, and got knocked down in a hit and run, failing the mission we thought we had just completed. That was a kick in the teeth. But it was also a good indicator of just how chaotic and free-wheeling *Sniper: Ghost Warrior 3* has become now that it has embraced a fully open sandbox approach.

The mission itself proved to be fairly straightforward with a small band of Georgian rebels holding hostages near an abandoned and decrepit church. We approached with music blaring and kicking up dust with screeching turns in the hopes of intimidating them, but as it turned out we weren't as close as we thought and they didn't hear a thing. As such a stealthier approach became available and we crawled up some rocks opposite the church to get a good vantage point.

From here we could look through the scope and see who was in line for a direct shot. This was also a good opportunity to pull out our new spy drone, which we could then directly control and fly around the area. It was important to keep a certain amount of distance so as not to sound the alarm (these guys will notice a drone floating in their faces and become suspicious), while also being close enough to auto tag each hostile. With about five or six baddies in our way, we could think about charging on the building.

■ Above: While the location is broadly real, the conflict and exact geography of this game world are fictionalised versions of the real Georgia.

The guards out front proved to be no trouble, helped significantly by the short distance and minimal bullet drop. There are all sorts of in-game tools you can use to read the wind direction, potential drag of gravity on your shot and so on, but we thought we would free-hand these targets and enjoyed some success. With the outer perimeter secured we headed into the church and found no-one there, so a little clambering gave us a nice viewpoint on the last few rebels in the graveyard, holding guns to the heads of our hostages.

At this point we could have just rushed them with our machine gun, of course. While sniping is the primary interest of this game, you're well-equipped for running and gunning if that's how you want to go. Likewise, we could have attempted some close range stealth kills if we wanted, but this is *Sniper: Ghost Warrior 3*, not Stabby: Ninja Warrior. Some quick shots took out the last guards before they could locate our shooting position in their alarm, and having freed the captives we sauntered back to the jeep for another mission… only to be hit by a van and die. Oh well, time to try again.



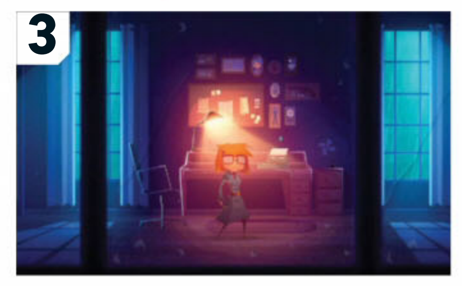
"This is our biggest project we've ever worked on and the entire team is pushing really hard to make the entire experience more polished."
MAREK TYMINSKI CI GAMES

SHOWCASE

MORE TITLES TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

1


2


3


4


5


OLD TIME HOCKEY

Format: **PS4, Xbox One, PC**
Publisher: **V7 Entertainment**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **TBC 2017**

1 Inspired as much by classic, simpler ice hockey titles from around the late Nineties as it is by the Seventies, *Old Time Hockey* is the kind of arcade sports game we've missed. It's got all the classic hockey moves, plus cartoon action and lots of violence. And, of course, it's got a retro Seventies look to it, too, just for some added flavour. We've not had a good tongue-in-cheek sports game for a while and this one looks to have strong gameplay and a sense of humour. The fact that games can descend into fistfights with full punching controls is evidence that V7 Entertainment knows what hockey is really about.

BATTLE CHEF BRIGADE

Format: **PS4, PC**
Publisher: **Trinket Studios**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **TBC 2017**

2 In an ingenious move that combines combo-based battle action with puzzle-based gameplay, *Battle Chef Brigade* uses food and your role as a kind of uber-cook for the elite of a fantasy realm to bridge the gap. Head out into the realm and take on all manor of fantasy beasts and animals, defeating them and then preparing them for supper. Out in the world this is pure action-platformer stuff as you gather the ingredients you need for your next dish, but in the kitchen it's puzzling as you must prepare and cook your dishes to perfection and have them judged by a panel. The 2D animation style is lovely, too.

JENNY LECLUE

Format: **PS4, PC, iOS**
Publisher: **Mografi**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **TBC 2017**

3 In a town where nothing ever happens, Jenny LeClue is about to be tasked with the case of a lifetime as her mother is accused of murder. Not a bad way to kick-off an adventure game, especially one where there is no definitive right answer to chase and decisions made through the game can have an impact on how the story plays out. The overall world design is one that is packed with features and hidden secrets for those who have the curiosity to go poking around in every corner they find. The more you investigate, the bigger the mystery that unfolds and the greyer the morality of what is in front of you.

VANE

Format: **PS4**
Publisher: **Friend & Foe**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **TBC 2017**

4 We've known for some time that *Vane* is vaguely *Ico*-esque, helped in large part by connections to Fumito Ueda's team back in the day, but what *Vane* is delivering is a little stranger than even that connection might have implied. With an open sandbox and the ability to fly around as a bird, *Vane*'s world is one of desolate beauty at a distance and discordant chaos up close. You'll spend your time alternating between bird and child it would seem, and when you're on ground level the movement of the world around you is sure to be disorientating. It's reminiscent of the recent PS4 indie hit *Bound*.

MAGES OF MYSTRALIA

Format: **PS4, PC**
Publisher: **Borealys Games**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **TBC 2017**

5 The key selling point of this charming-looking action game is the ability to combine various runes you find in the game into millions of possible spells. Yes, millions. It's an ambitious statement to make, but the premise seems solid to us. You'll be playing as a mage in a world where magic users are exiled, meeting other outcasts and learning to control and enhance your abilities. The potential for playing around with magic in this world should be pretty limitless and the world itself promises to be something special thanks to *Dungeons & Dragons Forgotten Realms* author Ed Greenwood handling story duties.



HEAVY METAL

GUERRILLA GAMES IS ABOUT TO EMBARK ON ITS RISKIEST PROJECT EVER. THIS IS **HORIZON: ZERO DAWN**, THE MOST AMBITIOUS PS4 GAME YET

There's a small herd of deer grazing in a field. It is a quiet field, enclosed by towering trees and bronze autumn leaves that gingerly fall from their branches, floating carelessly in the wind. This enclosure ensures the docile creatures have just enough cover to let them stand idly by as a breeze rustles softly through the undergrowth, they are blind to the hostility of the world around them. Like clockwork they come here, the herd, simply content to brush through the lush green foliage undeterred, occasionally peeking their antlers towards the Dreamcast-blue sky that stirs above them; mountain ranges and wooden huts can be seen sat atop a distant horizon. But somewhere closer is a predator; the fleeting glimpse of a fiery red mane cutting through the grass is the only hint that this serenity is about to be shattered. It's a natural, idyllic scene that you'd likely find broadcast in 4K on a new season of *Planet Earth*, narrated by the docile tones of David Attenborough. But reality this is not, for something far stranger than nature lurks in plain sight. »



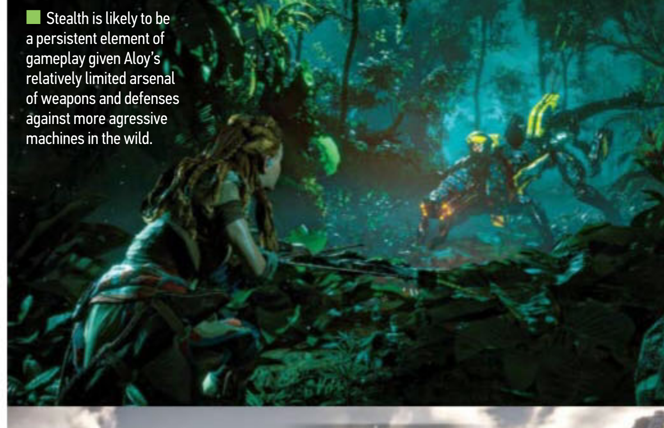
WILL KILLZONE EVER RETURN?

For now, it seems, Guerrilla will be taking a long hiatus from the *Killzone* franchise. That isn't to say that the studio won't one day return to it, but for now it is fully focused on *Horizon* and for whatever the future might hold for its new series. "We have never said that we will not go back to *Killzone*," says managing director, Hermen Hulst. "We still love that series very much, but in the near future we are just so deeply engaged with *Horizon* that is the only thing, frankly, that is on our minds at the moment. *Killzone* is a franchise that a lot of us grew up making and we still really like that universe, so who knows what is going to happen?"

Two arrows slice through the silence and strike one of the creatures; ropes bind it to the ground and, as it tumbles, it lets out a strange piercing scream that sounds almost mechanical in its desperate, warbled construction. The rest of the herd flees from the disruption manically as a fierce huntress emerges from the tall grass with a staff in hand. She plunges it deeply into the creature – the silhouettes of much larger monstrosities than her begin to pierce the periphery of vision, approaching slowly with purpose – and a blue hue begins to seep out from its ailing body. You see, this is no ordinary animal and she is no ordinary huntress. The deer is in actuality a Broadhead and it is made of steel not bone; there is no flesh to be found, only delicate wiring. This is the world of *Horizon: Zero Dawn*, a vibrant land inhabited by mysterious, mechanised creatures. And then there is you, Aloy, an outcast with the weight of the world on your shoulders. If you are to master the machines, if you are to unravel the mysteries of this land and if you are to play the most ambitious PlayStation exclusive of 2017, you are to put your faith in Guerrilla Games: a studio stepping so far out its comfort zone that it has arrived in a new world entirely.

Guerrilla Games has become synonymous with a particular breed of first-person shooters. The studio has honed its skills in constructing claustrophobic crawlspaces, weighty movement systems and gorgeous close-quarters action to an art. PlayStation owners will know Guerrilla as the studio behind *Killzone*, the game consistently pitched as the system seller, as the spearhead of new hardware and new technologies. And so, following the somewhat stilted launch of the PlayStation 4 Pro you'd be right in wondering when the inevitable sequel would rear its head. *Killzone: Shadow Fall* was an audacious launch title – it has been three years already, our bodies are prepared.

But a *Killzone* sequel is not coming; Guerrilla has been working on something bigger and far bolder than it has ever attempted before. This, in and of itself, is surprising. The videogame industry might have grown to become one of the largest entertainment



Stealth is likely to be a persistent element of gameplay given Aloy's relatively limited arsenal of weapons and defenses against more agressive machines in the wild.





The size of the machines you need to confront and navigate in this game is impressive and intimidating.

mediums in the world since *Killzone*'s debut back in 2006, but it's become more difficult than ever for a studio to actually break away from its area of expertise and take a real honest-to-god risk. Budgets have ballooned and team sizes have expanded; design and execution has spiralled in complexity while expectations of quality have only become higher – feedback from fans is more immediate, not to mention abrasive – than ever before. This is game design in the seventh generation – in this tumultuous environment a single failure can now cost a studio everything.

Perhaps it is this that makes *Horizon: Zero Dawn* look and feel so genuinely refreshing. The Dutch development group is banking everything on its enthusiasm here, letting internal excitement guide the studio towards its latest endeavour. That means the FPS genre has been abandoned in favour of the action-RPG, the corridors exchanged for a staggering open world governed by intricate, dynamic ecosystems. The engineered thrills and orchestrated set-pieces left by the wayside as Guerrilla puts its faith in the players to foster energetic, emergent experiences in a construction it has not once displayed any experience in. Then again, perhaps it's just the giant mechanical dinosaurs that have us weak at the knees. Honestly, it's hard to know anymore.

"I essentially asked the entire development team for ideas," says Hermen Hulst, managing director of Guerrilla Games. He's recalling the leadership decision that he and game director Mathijs de Jonge made back in 2010 that could very well make or break his studio come 28 February. "There were many ideas, maybe 40," he says of the company initiative, "but we picked out two of the concepts that were interesting. One was incredibly sensible: it hit all of the right boxes and it made sense on so many levels, and that was definitely the wise decision to follow. But the other one was *Horizon: Zero Dawn*."

All of this emerged from studio veteran Jan-Bart van Beek – the art director besotted with the idea of a world in which machines were as natural as the wildlife. And here we are, with a concept made reality, that takes Earth forward a thousand years, into a post-apocalyptic state where humanity has regressed, replaced as the dominant species by breathtaking robotic dinosaurs of an unknown origin. *Horizon: Zero Dawn* was brought to life by excitement and ambition, but it has evolved into the beast you see before you through sheer will – a stubborn desire to not become intimidated or overwhelmed by risk and adversity.

"I think we have embraced this project fearlessly, to be honest," considers Hulst, clearly unfazed by our continued bewilderment at the sheer scope of the undertaking that *Horizon* represents. "From day one, we have been very much in love with the project and I believe, at the end of the day, that when you take on so much risk it is offset by enthusiasm, the sincere passion that the people feel for the project."

But Guerrilla didn't, by its own admission, have the tools; it didn't have an engine that could facilitate the seamless streaming of an open world, nor did its personnel have any expertise in action-RPGs. The studio didn't have any systems in place for open-world content creation, nor did it have any experience in quest design. For the first time in its 15-year history, Guerrilla was having to build a floating, third-person camera. Looking at it from this perspective you might begin to wonder whether enthusiasm can only do so much, but then you see it in action and you begin to dream. Then, eventually, when you get your hands on a controller that dream becomes a reality; *Horizon: Zero Dawn*, at a technical level, is one of the most impressive undertakings in the modern industry.

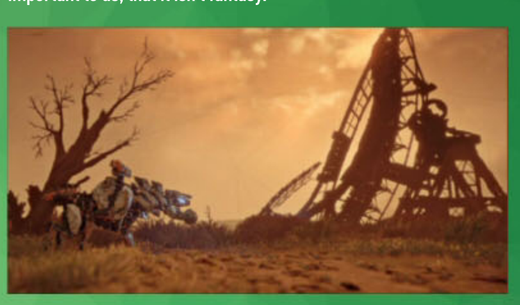
"The first thing we did was we hired a new lead with experience in the genre, and then we built up a team (mostly new hires) that had experience in games like this," says Hulst, noting that John Gonzalez was also brought on as lead writer. His previous credits include *Fallout: New Vegas* and *Middle-Earth: Shadow Of Mordor*.

"On the technical side, even though it is still the original code base of the early *Killzone* games, it has evolved [significantly]; the engine has had such a major overhaul that we actually rebranded it – we now call it Decima," he says of the engine that has caused such a stir in the industry that even mad genius Hideo Kojima was spurred on to ditch any plans of creating his own proprietary backbone and instead decided to embrace Decima as his own for *Death Stranding*. "The quest creation tools and the »

THIS HAS BEEN BY FAR THE MOST AMBITIOUS PROJECT GUERRILLA HAS EVER TAKEN ON

GROUNDED IN REALITY

One thing we were certainly happy to have confirmed was Guerilla's commitment to science fiction. With so many lingering questions about the narrative, the machines and the characters, we had begun to wonder whether a quick fantasy fix would be on the way to explain it all away. Guerilla's managing director Hermen Hulst says this couldn't be further from the truth. "Fantasy is actually something that we are avoiding. That's actually another thread between *Horizon* and *Killzone*, everything is grounded in reality, that is our design philosophy; we try to design assets in the game that look like they could be made with [modern] technology. It's a science-fiction story that we are telling, full of science-fiction designs and that is really important to us, that it isn't fantasy."



content creation tools, all of it has been created as we went about making this game," continues Hulst, "it has be a rough challenge, but it has also been a very fun challenge."

"It's actually easier to do a project that is so far out of your comfort zone than it is to do a project that your people aren't interested in – even if it follows in exactly your expertise, that is my conviction," he maintains. "The entire concept was so exciting to us that we couldn't help but do this project… but yes, it has been a massive undertaking. This has been by far the most ambitious project Guerrilla has ever taken on."

It's easy to see why this is the case. *Horizon: Zero Dawn* is set in a gorgeous, sprawling open world. It has small settlements, filled with the last tribal remnants of a splintered humanity; rolling hills and mountains, stretching deserts and lush forests. If you forget about the corrupted mechanical monsters rampaging about the place for a second, you'll find an Earth that has never looked so at peace.

"There's a certain beauty that we like to pursue in our worlds. *Killzone* had an almost gritty sort of beauty, but you wanted to escape from it," says Hulst, noting a thread Guerrilla has carried across from *Killzone*. "In *Horizon*, we wanted to create a world that you actually wanted to be in, that you wanted to spend time in endlessly exploring. It's a different philosophy – we are still perusing beauty but in a very different way."

But this beautiful world is also one that is shrouded in mystery. It's up to you, as Aloy, to discover the answers for yourself. In this overgrown, majestic space you'll find the machines living in harmony with familiar animals, such as rabbits, boars and foxes, though both groups can be hunted. The animals might provide an easy opportunity to gain precious resources, though taking on the might of the machines is much more of a risk versus reward situation.

They exist in distinctive, disruptive ecosystems that vary as you progress through the game and unlock more of the map; some will move in packs, while others will be indigenous to certain temperate climates or bodies of water. Hunting the machines is where *Horizon* begins to define itself against the deluge of action-RPGs on the market, leaning on Guerrilla's penchant for creating fast, tactical combat and advanced AI systems.

"Just like the Helghast were the stars of the *Killzone* series, the machines are the stars of *Horizon: Zero Dawn*. There are a wide variety of them, we really designed them with the philosophy of tactical combat in mind; we built up this entire ecosystem of these machines and they have very different purposes. It is important that the player has the perception and understands that these machines work together. Some scout for danger for others while the others are grazing, others operate in a convoy and they carry objects, and they have different roles and they work together."

Hulst notes that this was a decision made with purpose. The behaviour of these machines isn't scripted, at least in the traditional sense. The team has designed the game in such a way that every encounter can feel like its own bespoke boss battle, with AI adapting to both the scenario and surroundings – it is, as the studio says, "free flowing".

"Certain machine kinds operate in groups and then the group AI behaviour becomes very important as well, but then when you isolate one, its autonomous behaviour has to stand up in its own right. There's a real need for sophistication in the AI when it comes to dealing with these machines when you're trying to pursue intense, tactical combat."

One thing is immediately clear from the moment you get your hands on a controller: the combat *is* intense and deeply tactical. It's a far cry from the heavily refined (yet ultimately tiresome) combat systems found in the *Batman Arkham* and *Assassin's Creed* games, far more fluid and intuitive than the heavily scripted systems of *The Witcher* and *Dragon Age*, precise in a way that *Skyrim* could only dream of. *Horizon: Zero Dawn* might be branded an action-RPG, but it often feels like an action game first.

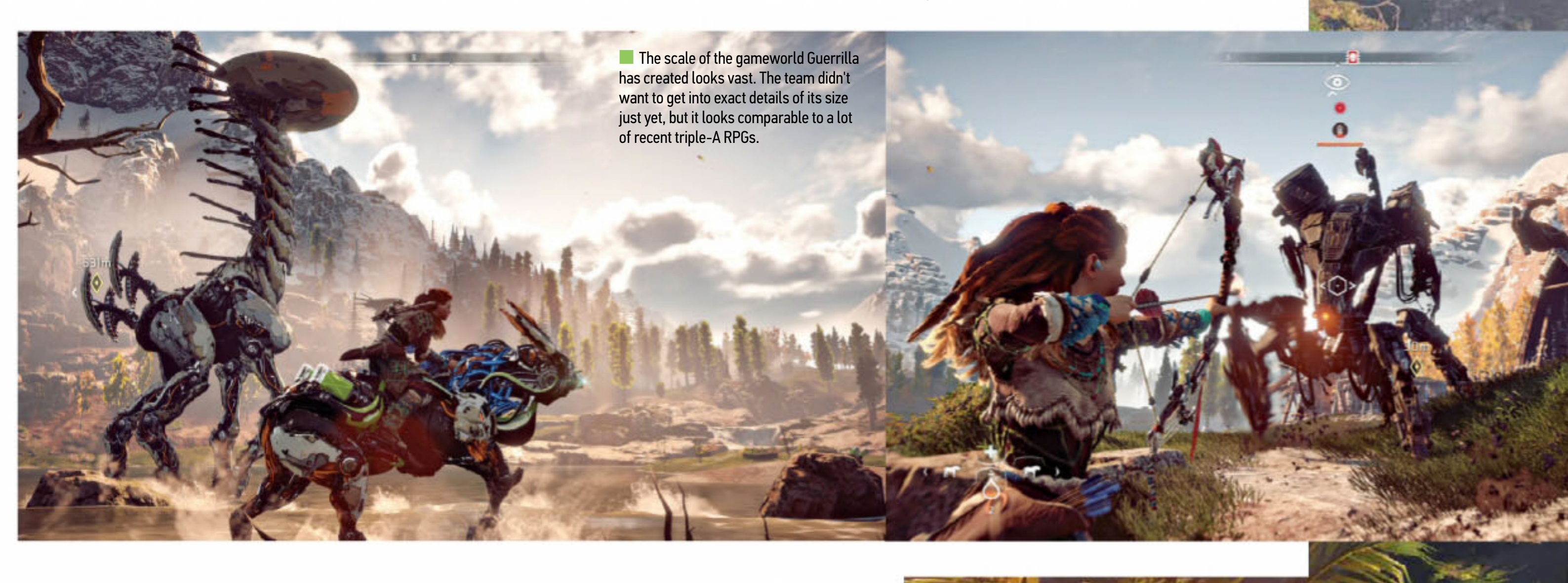
"I would say that we are definitely [building] on our learnings and on the expertise we've gained [working] on the *Killzone* series for our work now on *Horizon: Zero Dawn*," considers Hulst. "Intense tactical combat is what we've always strived for in the *Killzone* series and that is exactly what we are trying to create in *Horizon*. At its very essence, you play as a machine huntress, and you play against enemies that have incredible AI – they aren't scripted, they are very fluid and can be very unpredictable. The tactical approach that you need to apply is an area that greatly benefits from our expertise from the *Killzone* series."

"I think it's an opportunity for us to set our game apart from other open-world games," continues Hulst, clearly aware that many open-world games are too often copycat designed in their core systems to the detriment of the larger experience. "Intense tactical combat – it isn't easy to do that in an open world or to build up that expertise and I believe that can be something that is special about *Horizon: Zero Dawn*."

"Besides," he says, with a laugh, "to my knowledge we are the only game that empowers you to effortlessly fight and craft ammunition on the fly while you are running from a charging robo-dinosaur."

He isn't wrong.

As you begin to wrap your head around the different types of machines, your abilities and the world itself, your approach to combat will need to shift and evolve. Certain machines will be easier to take down as you uncover weak-points in their armour or upgrade Aloy's proficiency in specific skills. »



The scale of the gameworld Guerrilla has created looks vast. The team didn't want to get into exact details of its size just yet, but it looks comparable to a lot of recent triple-A RPGs.



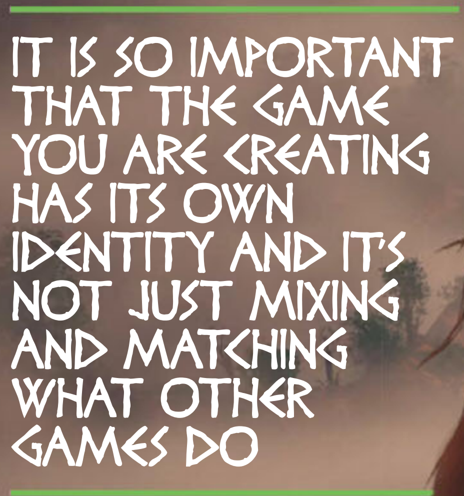
DISTRACTIONS APLENTY

Worried about Guerilla's proficiency in quest and open-world map design? Managing director Hermen Hulst assures us that it is all in hand. "We really sized the world to achieve the density of content that is necessary for a great open-world experience. And I'll admit that we started off with a world that was too big, that would have been cumbersome [to navigate] and we wound up sizing it down a little bit, but it's still huge! In this world you will never feel like it is a small world, if anything it is the opposite… it's a big game, you could spend many hours playing this."

"There's a huge main quest line that tells the main story but apart from that there are a lot of secondary stories, lots of side-quests and open-world activities. There is a lot of free-roaming gameplay that Aloy can engage in and that will still have a lot of backstory – where you can learn about the tribes or some of the idiosyncrasies of the world we have created."

Aloy can be upgraded and customised in a lot of ways to personalise your style of play, but her core persona has been established, not unlike Geralt in *The Witcher*.

IT'S ACTUALLY EASIER TO DO A PROJECT THAT IS SO FAR OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE THAN IT IS TO DO A PROJECT THAT YOUR PEOPLE AREN'T INTERESTED IN



THE POWER OF 4K

Horizon: Zero Dawn is being seen by many as Sony's greatest showcase of 4K and HDR for PS4 Pro, something that the new console variant has been sorely missing since launch. It was something that came in a little later in production for Guerrilla according to Hulst, but still something that seems to have excited the team a great deal.

"I don't know the exact timing of it, but obviously we were close to the fire. When we heard about it we started working on it right away," he tells us. "It hasn't been a huge undertaking in terms of resources dedicated to this – not at all, actually, but then new hardware just enables a fantastic re-presentation. The bulk of the innovation is in the visual representation, and I think the game itself with all of its colour and lush nature lends itself so well to representation in 4K and HDR that the team was super excited about this. We have a lot of people who like to embrace new technology and build showcases for PlayStation to see what we can do and that's been no different with the PlayStation 4 Pro as we try and get *Horizon* to run on 4K and in HDR. It has been super exciting and the concept lends itself so well to this."

Exactly what created and motivates the machines remains a mystery, but something appears to be infecting them and causing them to act violently against humans and each other. Many will actually leave you alone and can be hacked to tame.



Certain machines will seek to keep watch of the weaker constructions, these can be taken off of the table first through stealth or you can run into combat under a hail of fire arrows, picking off enemies and perhaps even hacking them to momentarily turn the tide of battle in your favour. Other, larger machines will take more planning to take down; some require deft movement and counter-strikes, while others will need to be scaled in scenes that wouldn't look out of place in a Guerrilla Games reboot of *Shadow Of The Colossus*.

It's fun and it's fluid, while the combat is challenging and weighty in a way that only Guerrilla could construct. And while it's easy to draw comparisons between *Horizon* and other open-world games of the same ilk, it ultimately has to stand on its own two feet. While we have (and will continue to have, until we can see the final game in action) concerns of how well the studio will be able to manage quest design and overall cohesion between its wider narrative and overworld – something genre veterans still struggle with to this day – the core of the game is just so damned impressive.

"It is so important that the game you are creating has its own identity and its not just mixing and matching what other games do, [*Horizon*] is really built from the ground up," confirms Hulst, suggesting once more that the game is being led by the original concept, rather than the concept bending to fit a checklist of 'RPG-must haves'. "We created this machine huntress and this incredible world – with this beautiful nature where the tribes live and the machines are the dominant species – and that world asks for certain gameplay, and so you develop it from there."

The combat has, then, developed to become intuitive, almost instinctual, with Aloy able to bend to combat situations quickly so long as you have a decent handle on the quick-wheel weapon swap system and suite of dodge and jump manoeuvres. Customisation and crafting is deep but ultimately fast, with ammunition, traps and explosives created on the fly. This is a streamlined RPG – don't expect to spend more than a few minutes trawling through menus or staring at item statistics.

"We have a very rich skill tree that empowers the player to customise Aloy freely. The skills on the tree sit under three archetypes – Stalker, Brave and Forger – and each has its own identity," confirms Hulst. "We have rich customisation of weapons and outfits. There is an extensive crafting system in place, so you really get to determine Aloy and get to develop her as a character as she levels up and earns experience."

What continues to surprise us is just how deep *Horizon: Zero Dawn* seems to be. It's a game that requires you to think your way into every combat and situation and then, subsequently, to victory. Whether you choose to shoot off armour to expose enemy weak points – making use of traps, your bow and numerous arrow variations to make precise strikes – or you decide to shoot weapons off the larger enemies and turn them on the machines, it will force the smart AI to react in new and interesting ways. This, ultimately, all ties back into Aloy, the star of the experience. How you build, nurture and evolve this protagonist will shift and warp *Horizon* around you.

And yet, there is still so much that we simply do not know about Aloy. Ever since her debut at E3 2015, we've all been intrigued by her character. She isn't just a trained hunter or an explorer – a Lara Croft with a new hairstyle – but an outcast of a tribal village, caught up protecting a slice of the world from the threat of mechanised monsters.

"This quest is a deeply personal one for her, as she is searching to understand her origins," teases Hulst. "That's the other part of this game, that her personal quest puts her on a collision course with some of the biggest dangers of this world and the mysteries of how it came to be."

Discovering who she is, what caused her to be shunned by the Nora tribe as a child and who her parents were are all central themes of *Horizon* – alongside discovering where the machines originated from. Guerrilla has never been known as a studio of storytellers, but there's something intriguing about the concept, especially as the studio continues to maintain that it hasn't seen anybody online figure it out yet. She is a character that has grown out of the original concept, and following her story will no doubt be one of the most exciting elements of the game come February.

"Aloy sort of showed up in the original concept; we were concepting this game, lots of gorgeous images of the setting, and it's almost as if she just stepped out of the early concept art – as if she wouldn't be denied, if that doesn't sound too pompous. I kind of phrase it as Aloy was the ideal vessel for the player to inhabit this world. We wanted somebody who is bright, tough and scrappy and she seems to be the perfect vessel for the player to take in the beauty and all of the mysteries of this world."

Horizon: Zero Dawn is a huge risk, but it is also incredibly ambitious. Never did we ever believe that the new huge action-RPG in this industry would be arriving from the developers of *Killzone*, but then *Horizon* couldn't come from anywhere else. If what we've seen of this game is representative of the final, sprawling open-world experience, then Guerrilla will stand as proof that a developer needn't let one genre define its entire future.

Guerrilla has made it clear that the open world in *Horizon* is one that the team wants you to really explore. The environments we've seen so far appear to be diverse and interesting to traverse.



20 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT MASS EFFECT ANDROMEDA

THE PREMIER SPACE EPIC OF OUR LIFETIME IS RETURNING SO WE SAT DOWN WITH MASS EFFECT CREATIVE DIRECTOR MAC WALTERS AND PRODUCER FABRICE CONDOMINAS TO PICK APART THE LATEST GAMEPLAY REVEALS, WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM NEW CHARACTERS AND MUCH MORE

NEW ENGINE, NEW BEGINNING

01 The original *Mass Effect* trilogy was built on Unreal Engine 3 and while over the years it was modified and evolved to suit the specific needs of BioWare's creation, it still had its own unique look and feel. *Andromeda* is joining *Dragon Age: Inquisition* by switching to DICE's Frostbite engine. "Any time you switch to a new engine there are always going to be challenges, not the least of which is that basically we're also coming to a new generation of consoles," Walters tells us. "Every asset that we've ever relied on in the trilogy before was basically just a glorified concept at this point. We had to rebuild everything from scratch, which of course adds to the burden of what you're doing. It allows us to also bring everything forward and really utilise the strengths of Frostbite."



THE BENEFITS OF FROSTBITE

02 A key benefit of the Frostbite engine is that since it was designed by DICE for FPS gameplay it is perfectly suited to the combat-heavy approach of the *Mass Effect* series in more recent years. It needs a little augmenting for the kind of pace and array of abilities that *Mass Effect* excels at, but BioWare seems happy with the results. "Frostbite was originally a first person shooter engine, so it actually has taught us a lot in some areas, specifically in areas of combat that we've got," Walters explains. "We obviously had to push it a little as our combat is a little more frenetic and a little more power based than anything you would have seen before."

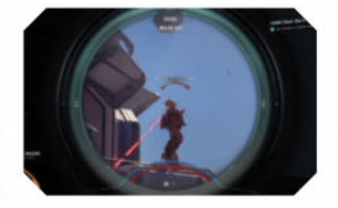
EVERY STUDIO IS TECH SUPPORT

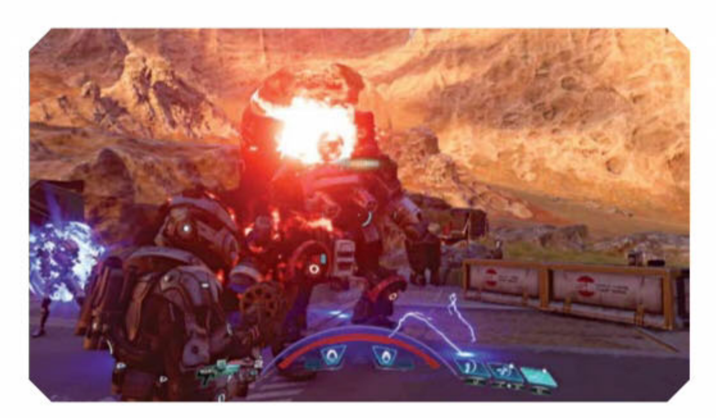
03 Since the Frostbite engine has been adopted and embraced by several teams across Electronic Arts, BioWare is able to call upon the expertise of other studios for more than just their opinion. They can give *Mass Effect* real engine-level support to make it better. "Even when we were working on the Nomad, we were able to pull in some people from *Need For Speed* and send it over to them and say, 'Hey, what do you think? We'd really like your feedback on this'," Walters tells us. "And they were able to give us not only subjective feedback on what they thought of the vehicle itself, but also very specific technical feedback that was able to help us improve it in Frostbite."



THE INFLUENCE OF PGA TOUR

04 "I think some of the biggest wins on it were the environments," Walters insists to us. "It does environments so gorgeously. Some of the places you're going to visit in *Andromeda* are going to look far and away better than anything you've ever seen in *Mass Effect* before. It really is amazing." And the team went to an interesting source of information to get the most from Frostbite in this respect. "Our graphics programming team worked a lot with *PGA* [*Tour* team, EA Tiburon] on the environment and the quality of the vegetation and the grass," Condominas reveals to us. "There is a lot of crossover that is not obvious, but actually happened." »





FROSTBITE ALSO HELPS WITH AI

05 While Frostbite's primary appeal in many respects is its visual fidelity, BioWare was also interested in tapping into the kind of programming DICE puts into its enemy combatants, offering players something more tactically enticing and complex than might have been possible in previous *Mass Effect* titles "With the AI we had a lot of discussions with DICE in Stockholm, so there's this shared expertise that will obviously improve the quality of the game and makes everything more efficient," says Condominas. This makes additional sense given that *Andromeda* is offering much larger and more open areas of play than before and *Battlefield*'s AI is designed to take advantage of the game's sandbox design.

A NEW ENGINE BRINGS NEW MODELS

06 One of the things that jumped out at us with the latest *Andromeda* gameplay reveals is how much more varied some of the character modelling now looks. While some of this is just BioWare experimenting and pushing the series further along in terms of realism, Walters admits that the Frostbite engine really helps. "Frostbite is really focused on being able to provide some excellent visual quality for characters as well and not just environments and we've adapted it to push it even further. I think some of the stuff that we're doing with the shaders on our characters is far and away from what we've been able to accomplish in the past. The realism level in them is phenomenal and we're going to continue to work on that and polish that in the coming days."



AND THE POLISHING HASN'T STOPPED YET

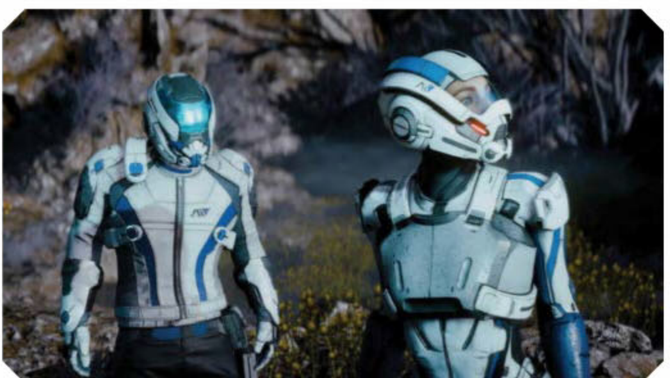
07 Some concern was raised about the facial animation and lip-syncing of character models in some of *Mass Effect Andromeda*'s gameplay, but BioWare insists that these concerns have been noted and that with the majority of the game now locked it can spend the next few weeks in a final polish phase. That will likely include tweaks to the primary default character models, going over cutscenes and dialogue sequences and making sure that they all work perfectly if you choose to create your own Ryder character at the start of the game. There's plenty of time to play around with some of these aesthetic elements in the lead-up to release.

CODEX REPORT

BIOWARE HAS CONFIRMED *ANDROMEDA* WILL RELEASE 23 MARCH IN EUROPE AND 21 MARCH IN NORTH AMERICA

THE INFLUENCE OF FIFA IS THERE TOO

08 You may recall that BioWare helped EA Canada with its development of The Journey for *FIFA 17* as it applied RPG elements to its story mode, but things went deeper than that according to Condominas. "There was a lot of discussion with the *FIFA* team actually and if you play the *FIFA* story mode you'll notice the BioWare signature in some of the aspects of it. The interesting thing is that a lot of people are mentioning the story mode in *FIFA 17* and how BioWare helped to put that together, but it goes both ways, right? For example, we're using animation systems that *FIFA* was developing and looking at. It really goes both ways."



ANDROMEDA HAS FULL PERFORMANCE CAPTURE

09 "For the first time ever in any BioWare project we've actually used a full performance capture for some of our more high-end scenes," Walters tells us. "We've done motion capture before, but performance capture is really taking the whole scene into account and making sure we're getting data from all of the characters in the scene at one time. That was no small feat, just because of the character swapping. We don't even know if your Ryder character is male or female in that scene and we have to do alternate versions of it. Which squad mates are along with you? We don't know." Interestingly, this lead to another benefit of working with the *FIFA* team. "We used the facilities in Burnaby, British Columbia (where EA Canada is based) heavily. They're well-equipped to handle that probably in part because they work with so many of the sports teams and other teams, [so they've] worked like that before."



IT'S USING INQUISITION'S OPEN-WORLD EXPERIENCE

10 *Dragon Age: Inquisition* was a massive game for BioWare, leading the charge into this generation, on Frostbite and into a broader style of exploration than had been done before by the team. No surprise then to see *Andromeda* tapping into that talent and experience. "We have a large number of people who worked on *Dragon Age: Inquisition* actually on the project, so they brought all of their expertise with them and, of course, of a lot of the knowledge that we were seeking from them was partly Frostbite knowledge and what they had done there, but also the open world, because that was something that they had tackled that no one had really done at BioWare before and, to be frank, something that was really being pushed on Frostbite as well," says Walters. "I think they had some good lessons that were learned after it was shipped about how to do an open world properly. They got some fan reaction and we've taken that into account." »

THINK OF IT AS A MOVIE WITH TV SPIN-OFFS

11 BioWare is hoping to make its side missions and stories feel more connected to the main narrative while also offering a satisfying, self-contained experience. Walters compares it to have both a movie and TV episodes working together. "Each of those planets has its own big choice that you have to make on," he explains. "If the main campaign is an epic, sprawling movie then each planet is a little TV episode that you can do separately and it all feels self-contained, although they're all much longer than movies or TV episodes."

"Gameplay naturally supports that context while working on them, for example, this is why we're crafting these interplanetary quests and how we build some link between all these activities," Condominas adds.

CODEX REPORT

BIOWARE HAS SAID THAT NO VR ADD-ON IS CURRENTLY PLANNED FOR *MASS EFFECT ANDROMEDA*

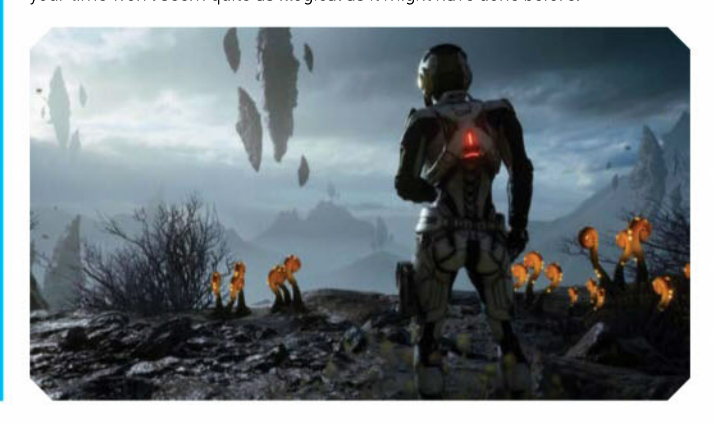


YES, THERE'S SOME WITCHER III INFLUENCE

12 "We've really looked at other games that have been more successful [with regard to storytelling], like *The Witcher III* lately, as far as quest density and how much the quests are intertwined to the critical story," says Walters. "That's something that we're pushing much harder on this game. A good example of that would be the planets that you land on to explore." And you may even see it in loyalty missions with your squad. "It should also have key characters with their own storyline, which is interwoven with the critical path, but is its own story with all these branching sub-stories and quests that you can do. But it's all intertwined and woven together."

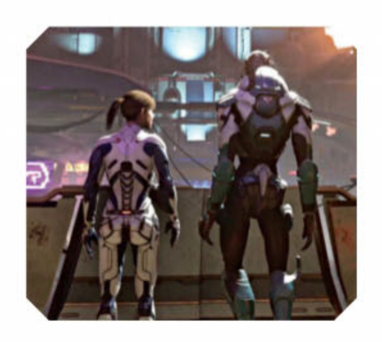
THINGS WON'T FEEL AS TIME-PRESSURED

13 If there was one common complaint about *Mass Effect 3* in particular (other than some objections to the ending) it would be that running around the galaxy doing side quests and loyalty missions against the backdrop of a Reaper invasion seemed a little frivolous. This is something that BioWare has acknowledged and has insisted that while there's certainly some intensity to the main narrative thread of *Andromeda*, there is not any apparent time-pressure on your quest, so wandering around this new galaxy and taking your time won't seem quite as illogical as it might have done before.





BIOWARE DOESN'T WANT TO SAY TOO MUCH ABOUT SQUAD MATES



14 "The turian is Vetra and the krogan is Drack, and in case it wasn't obvious in the trailer, the turian is a female turian as well," Walters confirms as we discuss the last gameplay trailer. "And they are both squad mates who will come along with you." But he doesn't want to give too much more away. "I'll be honest, my inclination is that I would rather people play that and experience it rather than us tell people how that works. One of the high-level things I guess I can say is that there is a planned sort of team that you're supposed to have when you arrive in Andromeda and they are not part of the planned team, because things go not the way you expect. I can give you that much, for sure."



EXPECT GREATER GENDER REPRESENTATION

15 In the *Mass Effect* trilogy we were gradually introduced to the various genders of each species and now we have a female turian in the form of Vetra as a squad mate. BioWare has also said that for every gender there might be in a given species, they will be represented in the game. So male and female krogans, salarians and anything else will apparently get their chance to appear in *Andromeda*. How significant a role any of them might get to play we'll have to wait and see, but it makes a lot of sense if these Milky Way travellers are looking to set up new populations in Andromeda that every facet of their species would be present.

THERE IS ONE RETURNING CHARACTER

16 While it's been widely accepted that *Andromeda* will not be leaning on any established characters from the Shepard trilogy, there is in fact one character from the original games that will be continuing through to *Mass Effect Andromeda*: Avina. Not familiar with the name? Well, Avina is actually the Citadel VI that you will have interacted with rather a lot when you first visited the installation in the original *Mass Effect*. She will be acting as VI aboard the Nexus for the Milky Way exhibition, a place you can bring species you meet in Andromeda so they can learn more about your home galaxy. It is also a place you can spend some time, of course, and a place for new players to get a little refresh on some of the core groups you'll be spending time with. »



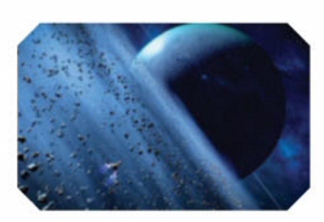
FOR THE REST YOU MIGHT NEED TO READ THE BOOK

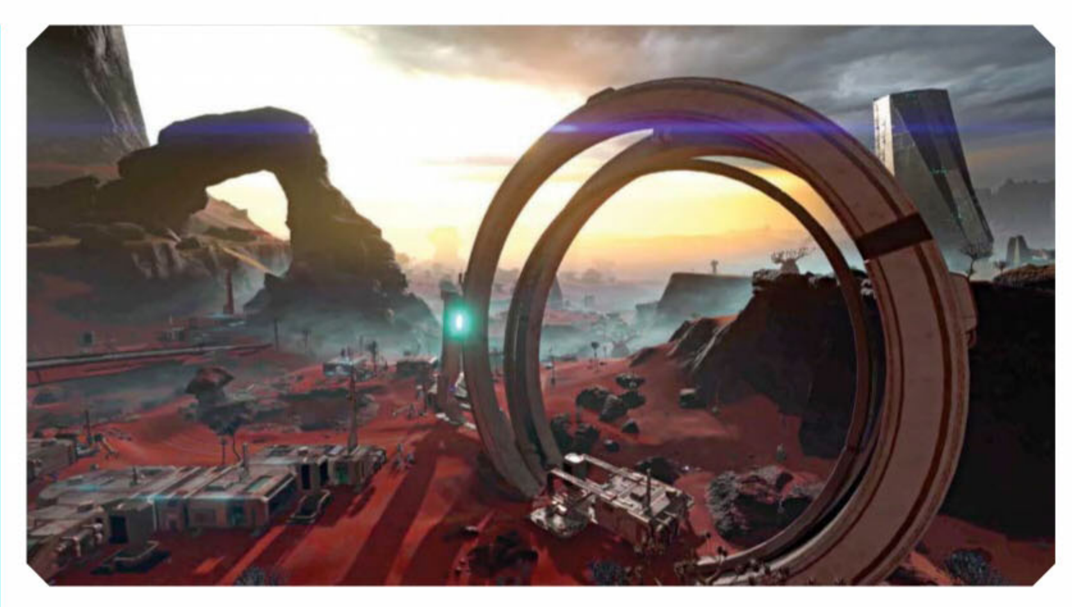
17 If you watched the latest gameplay reveal then you may have wondered how a settlement full of Milky Way-native people could have popped up in Andromeda so quickly. Why have they split off from the Andromeda Initiative programme? "There's definitely a big story reason, which we won't go into," Walters teases. "However I will give you a hint, if you've been following some of the news – as I'm sure fans have done – about the recent novels that have come out then you'll notice that the very first one is called *Nexus Uprising*. There's a little clue there." This book, *Mass Effect: Nexus Uprising* will be the first of a new series to tie into this next wave of games. "There might be a link," jokes Condominas.



AND THERE MIGHT STILL BE A MOVIE

18 As part of the original plan for *Mass Effect Andromeda* there were to be a series of books and a movie put into development. As creative director on the series, Mac Walters has been pencilled in to write the final book in the first wave and play a major role in the development of the movie that will tie into the series. That's a lot of projects to have on the simmer and Walters has said elsewhere that it might not all be possible in the timeframe, but a movie of some sort appears to be moving forwards, whether it ties directly into the new *Andromeda* series or something else in the future.





YOU CAN MAKE SETTLEMENTS OF YOUR OWN

19 An important gameplay mechanic and large duty for Ryder in their role as Pathfinder will be the act of surveying and establishing settlements just like the one we've seen in trailers. Find a suitable planet and on that planet a good spot and you can create your own little communities scattered through the systems. Presumably you won't be able to do this too often as there are only so many thousand people you can relocate from the human ark, Hyperion, but you never know. And who knows what kind of side missions and new stories might be tied to this activity? Just so long as we don't have to keep travelling back to protect them like we did in *Fallout 4*.



DON'T EXPECT A PRE-RELEASE RYDER MAKER

20 One fan-request we see a lot is for the character creation system, that we'll undoubtedly encounter at the start of the game, to be released ahead of *Mass Effect Andromeda* as a separate, tie-in download so we get make a head start on our Ryder designing. We asked the team if this was being considered. "I think it's something that we would consider, but at this point we don't have a plan to do that and if that changes we'll talk about it in the future," says Walters. "We know that our fans want it, but right now we're focused on everything that we can do for the game itself."

CODEX REPORT

MASS EFFECT ANDROMEDA IS NOT THE START OF A NEW TRILOGY, BUT BIOWARE SAYS IT MAY BE WORTH KEEPING YOUR SAVE GAME



THE RETURN OF THE KING

LEGENDARY WASTELAND DIRECTOR, FALLOUT PRODUCER AND CEO OF INXILE ENTERTAINMENT **BRIAN FARGO** TELLS US HOW HE PLANS TO RECLAIM THE RPG CROWN



On the horizon

WASTELAND 3

WHAT IS IT
AN APOCALYPTIC RPG
RELEASE DATE
2018

The series that started it all; as the precursor to *Fallout*, *Wasteland* has become one of the most legendary franchises in the industry. As a sequel to 2004's *Wasteland 2*, this release is set to offer an RPG-focused, squad-based combat alternative to the action-oriented *Fallout 4* – not to mention the inclusion of synchronous and asynchronous co-operative multiplayer.



On the horizon

THE BARD'S TALE IV

WHAT IS IT
A DUNGEON CRAWLER
RELEASE DATE
OCTOBER 2017

Another of Interplay Production's projects reborn in the modern era under the vision of inXile, *The Bard's Tale IV* is a true successor to the original trilogy of games. Built in the Unreal Engine 4, *The Bard's Tale IV* is a gorgeous first-person dungeon-crawler with an emphasis on improved combat and visuals.

Between *Torment: Tides Of Numenera*, *The Bard's Tale IV* and *Wasteland 3*, would it be fair to say that you're a pretty busy guy these days?

Yeah, you could say that! [laughter] Ever since we successfully crowdfunded Wasteland 2 *and shipped it, well, it really changed our company and opened up opportunities for us to do more products. It has let us get back in the saddle and start doing the stuff that we love to do. I'm very fortunate.*

It has now been five years since inXile launched that *Wasteland 2* crowdfunding campaign, would you say the studio has changed much in that time?

Greatly so! Before the campaign we were doing some development work for publishers, as you know, and that's a difficult thing, but that [process] allowed us to regroup. With titles that are crowdfunded, as soon as we ship them, we start to see the revenues right away. Then we can take whatever we make, put some money in the bank, and reinvest it into things like making Torment: Tides Of Numenera *or* The Bard's Tale IV *even better, or we can get ready for crowdfunded campaigns like* Wasteland 3.

It has completely changed our business. This year should be really interesting for us because we went through 2016 without shipping a game and that's rough; most people find it very difficult to make it through a year without shipping a new title. We are roaring into 2017 with revenues right away, so next year should be very positive for us too.

Was it a conscious decision to keep *Torment* out of the congested winter release window?

That was definitely a thought: whether or not we should really crank and get Torment *out in December, but, to me, we've already worked this long on it, let's just keep tightening it up. There's a lot of expectations being put on* Torment *too, especially as* Planescape: Torment *(1999) was – at least for some people – considered to be one of the best role-playing games ever made. We were hyper sensitive to making this one special and to not feel like any game you've ever played before.*

Isn't that a pretty high bar to set for yourself?

[Laughter] It is, it is! Fortunately we did put the game out in early access and the response has been great, really positive. It's definitely a game where you aren't going to go, "Ugh, been here and done that." It's unique and strange in its own way, without being derivative, and I'm really happy with it.

***Torment*'s crowdfunding campaign began three years ago, back in 2013, and it then missed its original 2014 release window. Would you say that development has been particularly challenging?**

*Yeah it has been challenging, though I think every game that I have ever worked on has been challenging [laughter]. There's a war story behind every single game, and that's something that most developers will tell you. If there is any thing that we do, it's that we tend to be overly ambitious; we shoot for the Moon and then that means I have to scale it back. [*Torment*] is one where the writers just went nuts!*

This thing is like 1.2 million words and that was not the word count that we planned on doing, it was supposed to be half that. The writers brought double in and then it was a case of, well, how do we wrangle this thing together? It's a lot of moving parts and these games are so big that even the leads, responsible for corralling all the writers and getting it all in – George (Ziets) and Colin (McComb) – neither of those two guys could tell you everything that is in the game, they are just that big.

InXile Entertainment seems to have a team that is as passionate and committed to making games as the fans that want to play it are, that must help?

These guys aren't just committed to the franchise but to the craft of role-playing games. If you think about the experience that George, Colin, Gavin (Jurgens-Fyhrie) and Chris Avellone have had, I mean they go back decades. They've played everything; they sit around philosophising on what makes a great role-playing game and discussing writing styles; they really make an art out of it.

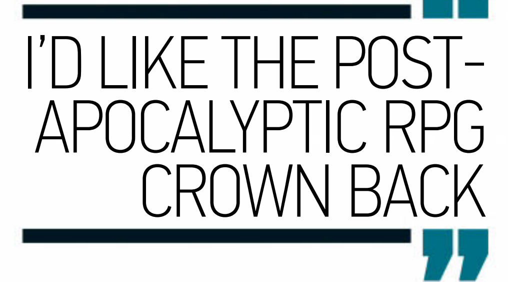
Crowdfunding has become a core part of inXile Entertainment's identity, would you say you've learned any key lessons in terms of communicating with and updating your fans?

Yeah, we have. When you launch a Kickstarter campaign – well, any kind of crowdfunding campaign – you're supposed know the release date before you even start or know the scope of the project, which would be nuts at a traditional company.

A publisher won't give you a date before they are at alpha or beta, much less before they began development. And, with Wasteland 2, *we learned that we would have people hammering us on the dates. So during the campaign for* Torment *– as the budget went up – we said, "Hey, you know that original date? Well we are making the scope of the game larger, so ignore that." We were constantly trying to stay on top of expectations like that.*

Has Early Access changed the way or timing in which you present your games to the public?

Early Access has been great for us. I would be frightened to put a game out for which I didn't have lots of people looking at it and banging on, giving us their impressions. You begin to see patterns of things, right? There are always extreme views one way or the other, of the ways things should be, but you will start to see patterns of things that people do and don't like. I like that, and it has been wonderful in helping us know when we are on point and when we are not.



It's interesting, isn't it? Not only are you now able to get broad feedback at any stage in development, but you are also able to watch players live through YouTube and Twitch.

We would actually watch people play Wasteland 2 *and* Torment *on live streams. We would all huddle around on our computers and watch them play, it is like the best QA group ever because they weren't being paid to do it. There isn't anything affecting them to try to be nice or react in any particular way; we always glean a lot of value out of that.*

Development has changed so much since the Nineties. Have you started taking Early Access and live streams into account when making your marketing plans?

You mentioned the Nineties, well, when we made Fallout, *we sort of just threw it out there and then you hope, you cross your fingers, that you nailed it. And then you get whatever feedback you got and whatever you got it was too late to implement it. So I always described this process as I'm moving the feedback that I used get post-launch to pre-launch so that I can actually do something about it. I would feel completely naked throwing a game out there with no outside feedback, so I'll do, at all costs, whatever I can do to get that feedback.*

***Torment* is the first of inXile's games to be released this year. Do you have any hopes for how it'll be received by fans?** »



Brian Fargo is the CEO of inXile Entertainment and also held the position as an original founder of Interplay Productions. Formed in 2002, inXile spent a number of years as a work-for-hire studio before establishing itself as the masters of crowdfunding and isometric RPGs.



Thanks to the success of *Wasteland 2*, inXile has expanded its operations greatly; not only has new talent flocked to the studio to assist with its three games it has in active production, but Fargo has also opened a satellite studio in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Oh gosh [laughter]. I mean, obviously, we are hoping it is going to be received really well. It's a single-player role-playing game and a lot of the world has gone towards multiplayer, to create-your-own and open-world [adventures]. This is a very different game from its narrative structure to… just about everything else!

I think it will perform well, I don't think it will do poorly. But, for us, we don't need a huge success to survive, we just need, like, a mid-level success. More importantly, I'm hoping it raises the profile of our company as a quality game creator. That's the most important thing, right? That people look at your company and say, "These guys did another great piece of work, we like and we trust these guys." That's the most valuable thing that you could have in this business, and we want that more than anything.

The reaction to *Wasteland 2* seems to have established this nicely. It wasn't just fuelled by nostalgia either; there seemed to be a lot of catharsis from the community around it too.

When I was managing Wasteland 2 *I felt that there were some other crowdfunding projects that outlined whatever they were going to do and then they got it out – they checked the boxes – but that was kind of it, it was minimal. I felt like we had to do more than just check the bare minimum boxes, we just had to. I pushed on that one very hard and* Torment *is the same way. I don't want anybody that backed it to say, "Yeahhh, they did it, but it isn't very inspiring." That is not the take away that I want.*

How has the structure of the studio adapted to having multiple games in active development?

We've always had a game and a quarter going on and now we've got two-plus games going at a time, so we've added on some new talent. If you look at the visuals for The Bard's Tale IV *and* Wasteland 3 *I think we are really finally starting to show off what we are able to do – our VFX department is doing just some amazing stuff. Isometric is great, but it isn't as immersive; that's why we are working to bring the camera down [to first-person] in* Wasteland 3 *during the key moments in conversations and cut-scenes, to make the world more impactful. You're starting to see what some of our new talent can do, we have a very passionate group of people.*

Speaking of *The Bard's Tale IV,* how is development progressing? InXile seems to have been keeping it close to the chest.

We've held back showing what we are doing with the combat system and I'm really happy with it – both from a visual style and a completely unique way to approach it. There's a core group of people that would be very happy if it were exactly the same as the first one – attack, attack, attack, defend, defend, defend, and then you sat back and watched to see what happened. But we don't think that exact play works in today's marketplace; we play modern games, it's not like we've been in a cryochamber since the Nineties and woke up and said, "What are we going to do?"

We sit around playing Skyrim, Hearthstone, Witcher *and all of these other projects, and we want to be right there with them, but in our own unique way. But we also know that party-based combat is important, that turn or phase-based combat is important; so we take all the elements and we say those things from* Bard's Tale, *those we have to do, but I wonder if we can put them in another form that moves along faster, that is visually more interesting, and that's what we've done. It is very unique, we're going to show it [soon]. When people see and understand it, when they see how much depth there is to the combat and how much thought is going to be involved, I think they are really going to appreciate it.*

Is the combat the element of the game that you are the most proud of then?

Yeah, I would say so. Like I said, it is very clever. If my brain is not engaged by the systems then I'm checked out. If I end up having to do the same thing every single time, in every instance of combat, then I'm going to be checked out. I think that's why people love Dark Souls, *because you're constantly changing your tactics to deal with stuff. Well, we are the same way. You'll need to come at [encounters] in a different way each time because you are going to get slaughtered if you take a typical approach. When you begin to feel and think that way, I begin to feel like it is mission accomplished because now you are using your own unique strategy and your brain to combat – no pun intended – these situations.*

How would you compare *The Bard's Tale IV* to *Wasteland 2* and what's coming with *Torment*? Are they going to be of a similar size and scope?

From a purely gameplay hours perspective? It is less ambitious, because with these games – with dungeon crawls – it doesn't have the same reading component and the same slow motion component of those products. It's still a solid role-playing game, hour wise, but it just isn't going to be half what those games are. It is, however, visually more ambitious than those two, because of the nature of where the camera is at, I think, and we will see what other people have to say. But I think it is right up there with some of the triple-A visuals you see out there.

WE PLAY MODERN GAMES, IT'S NOT LIKE WE'VE BEEN IN A CRYOCHAMBER SINCE THE NINETIES

Is it dangerous to begin comparing yourself to triple-A releases, considering the size of your studio and comparatively small budgets you attach to projects?

We are always really trying to push the envelope of the art of what we are doing. We'll always talk about everything that is being done with our RPGs; the innovations, things we are doing psychologically or mechanically that haven't been done before or things we are just barely scratching the surface of… we aren't a factory at all.

Though I do remember one reviewer was knocking down a review score a little bit – I think it was for Wasteland 2 *– because he said, "Well I have to compare it to* Call Of Duty,*" [laughter]. I said, "Well, you know that we are isometric and don't spend a fraction [of the budget], right?" And he says, "Yeah, but I have no choice." I'll never, ever get that.*

That's a curious decision. We tend to be of the opinion that you compare games against their like…

Well, we would prefer that [laughter]. But with our new products hopefully we are closing the gap. We can debate whether it is fair or not but at least we are closing the gap.

What is your biggest ambition with regard to *Wasteland 3*?

I'd like the post-apocalyptic RPG crown back [laughter]. I think there is an opportunity with what we are doing with the Wasteland *series to really cement our affinity to that little genre, which I grew up with and loved. I think the* Fallout *series has perhaps become a little too monster oriented. With me, I'm more into* The Road, Swansong *and* The Stand*; I like those aspects of civilisation breaking down and what it means from a real personal, human level, I find that fascinating. And so* Wasteland 3 *is more focused on that than, say, monsters – and of course we*

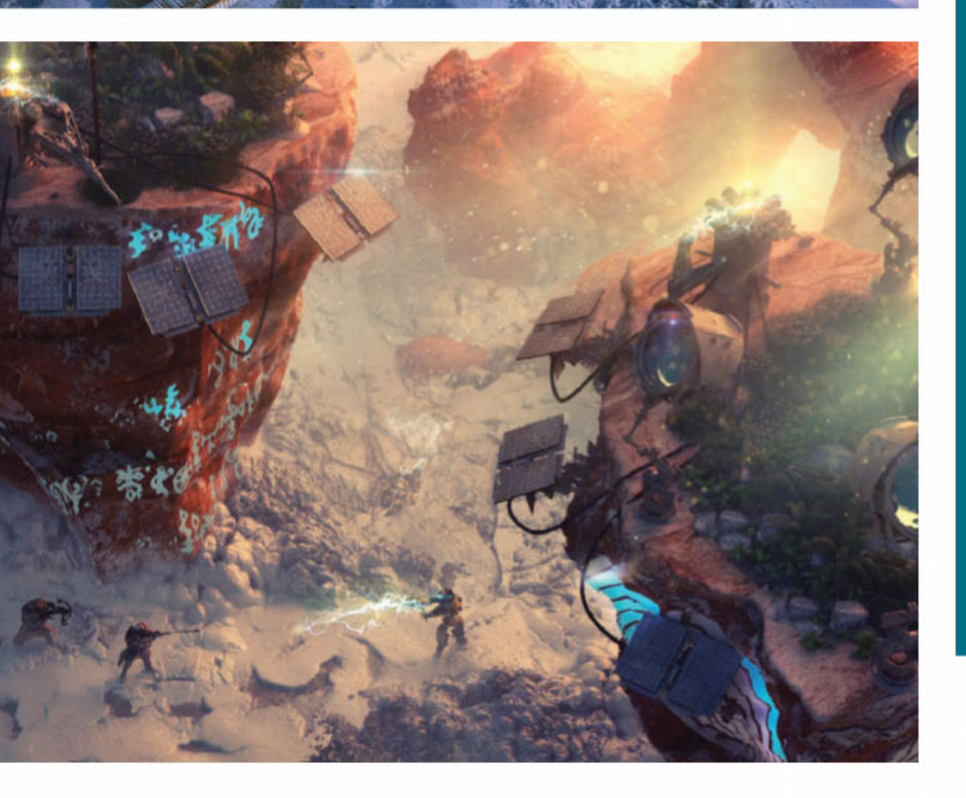


Wasteland 3 isn't slated for release until 2018, though Fargo is eager to get ahead of himself and release the game earlier.



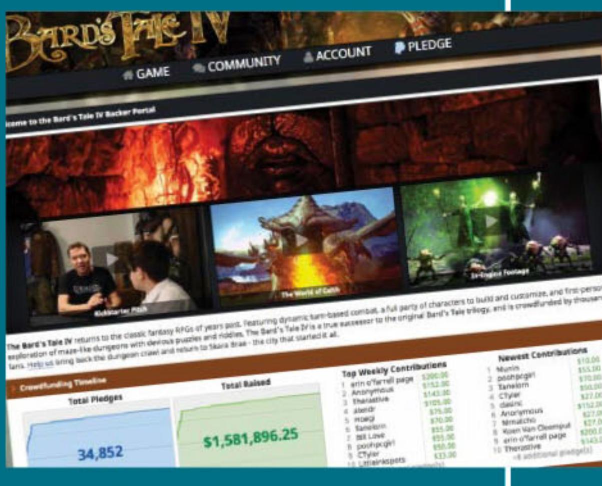
Back in the Eighties, Fargo established himself as a deft hand creating and shepherding RPG franchises. His biggest success is undoubtedly the creation of *Wasteland*; a precursor to *Fallout*, which Interplay later released in 1997.





HOW CROWDFUNDING HAS EVOLVED INXILE ENTERTAINMENT

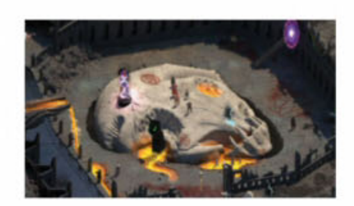
THE INXILE CEO'S DAY-TO-DAY WILL NEVER BE THE SAME AGAIN



Brian Fargo has two principle priorities at inXile, keeping his studio in business and keeping the quality of its games high; that's something he isn't willing to waiver on, and it's only been possible because of his incredible success in crowdfunding. "I've got to be the rainmaker, I've got to bring the money in and pay everybody so we can do this stuff. In the past, when we were a developer [for hire], almost all I could do was to hustle around to try to get us the next project. I'd have a team of 70 or 80 people working on a game and the publisher would say, 'Well, we will have to see how well this one does before we decide'," said Fargo, noting how crippling publisher indecision could be on creativity. "We are out of business by then [laughter], if we just shipped a game, sat around waiting to see what happens as our revenues went to zero. That left me sort of scrambling most of the time trying to figure out what the next gig was going to be and less on the products."

Thanks to the success of *Wasteland 2*, and a masterful harnessing of the Kickstarter and Fig funding platforms, Fargo is now able to do what he does best: create, unencumbered by the strains of running a business. "I can sort of relax for six or nine months and just think about product every single day, it's wonderful. It always takes me a while for me to not feel like I'm just screwing off," he said, laughing. "I'll sit in meetings every single day and we will talk about product and design, who is writing and all of that, and then instinctively I will just think, 'Man, I haven't gotten anything done today,' because I'm so used to having to focus on the business. So it's been a great treat for me in the times where I don't have to worry about that."





inXile Entertainment's primary focus right now is on improving the visual fidelity of its games, from hiring in talent adept with Unity or by adopting Epic's impressive Unreal Engine 4.

do have sci-fi elements because that's what the Wasteland *series is about. Then we have the multiplayer aspect, which is going to be great and we are going to do some super clever stuff with that.*

The multiplayer in *Wasteland 3* looks like it has the potential to be incredibly mischievous…

What we find is that most people, when they play with a friend, don't want to destroy the experience for the other person, they just want to tweak it a little – maybe get them arrested or thrown in prison or something, but they don't want to kill them off.

It would look like that RPG crown you want back is very much within your reach then?

*We are really trying to deliver on [*Wasteland 3*] and, like I said, isometric is great for combat but it… in our reveal trailer, you've seen that conversation [in first-person] with Fish-Lips and it changes everything. Your connection to that guy changes everything and so when combat goes back [to isometric], that person is far more real now that you've seen them up close and heard their voice; that changes the dynamic and that's what the immersion aspects of first to third person does for you.*

It's the same reason that Blizzard spends millions of dollars on those opening movies, because its characters become more real… they have a whole different vibe having seen [them] in the opening movies.

> "I WOULD FEEL COMPLETELY NAKED THROWING A GAME OUT THERE WITH NO OUTSIDE FEEDBACK"

The tradition with sequels has always been to go bigger and go bolder, but is there a risk of a shortfall when you're relying so heavily on crowdfunding to dictate a budget?

I think that a lot of things go wrong with [sequels] when they try to go bigger… I think that a lot of projects can go sideways in this [mentality]. With Wasteland 3*, we aren't making it as big as* Wasteland 2*; only like five per cent of players finished* Wasteland 2*, so I'd rather have less maps and go far more detailed and tighter than I would to go bigger and bolder, I don't think that buys you anything. But the bigger part for us is the visuals and that is things like the camera coming down for conversations, but that's sort of a different attack.*

I think the mistake people often make is that they say, "Well now we need twice as many weapons, twice as many maps, twice as many…" But it's the personality that you remember, it's the moments and the charm; it's the craft that makes these things special, not the size. We are going much narrower, tighter and smarter.



Thinking of picking up an inXile release? You better carve out some time; they are notoriously in-depth, epically deep RPG experiences.



How important do you think visual fidelity actually is? It seems to be a big focus for your next three games?

[There is] a new generation of people, that's why we need to improve the visuals. They aren't going to be all nostalgic about it, they aren't going to give us a pass; we better show some better stuff because all they are going to know is Witcher *or* Dark Souls*. They will allow a certain amount of variation – visually speaking – but the closer the gap the more we are likely to get the audience to want these things. We want to sell the most units, and why do we want to sell more units? So that we can make more products!*

This was one thing that happened with our crowd early on, where we asked what was important and they said, "Well we want a lot of attributes, conversations and depth, etc," and they'll put visuals at the bottom. But as soon as we ship the game, the first thing they complain about is any visual problems, and the graphics. It's always there, even if people won't really admit it.

Do you think the renewed success of classic isometric RPGs is simply a current trend in gaming or an inevitability?

I don't see these going away; clearly we have tapped a nerve. I think Larian Studios has had the most success, I think they have sold over 1 million copies of Divinity: Original Sin*, and I don't see any end in sight. Clearly they are a fun experience and I don't see that dropping off; the only reason they ever went away is because the publishers wouldn't fund them, not because the audience didn't want them – that was the whole premise for us wanting to do this. They've never gone away. We just had a moment where there were people like myself, and Obsidian, who wanted to make the games and we had a whole bunch of consumers who wanted the games, but then you had either a retailer or a publisher standing in our way. Thankfully, digital got rid of the retailer and crowdfunding got rid of the publisher; now we are back in business.*

On the horizon

TORMENT: TIDES OF NUMENERA

WHAT IS IT
A FANTASY RPG
RELEASE DATE
24 FEBRUARY 2017



Spiritual successor to one of the most critically acclaimed RPGs of all time, *Planescape: Torment*, inXile's first game of 2017 is a huge, sprawling, isometric fantasy RPG with a monstrous emphasis on storytelling and world exploration, with a script featuring over 1 million words and hundreds of hours of gameplay promised.

50 MOST INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE IN GAMING TODAY

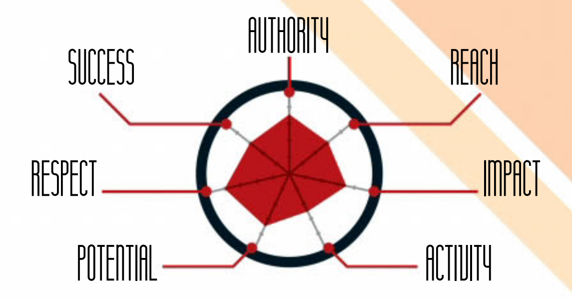
THE DEVELOPERS, CREATORS, LEADERS AND INVENTORS WHO ARE SHAPING GAMES

There are thousands of people working in games today who have an impact on the titles we play and the way they're made. Attempting to collate, judge and list so many individuals on the degree to which they impact the industry is something of a foolhardy endeavour, but one that we've attempted to complete all the same. In attempting to apply some form of methodology to our madness we've used a series of criteria to help us work out the degree to which each of these individuals influences the industry.

The first is authority, a measure of their control over the company or immediate area they work in. Reach is a measure of how far the things these individuals do can be felt through games. Impact is about the depth of the influence they have and how things they do have a direct consequence in the world. Activity we've added to emphasise the importance of constant contribution. Potential we've added to give those contributors who have much more to offer going forward some additional recognition. Respect is a mark of the regard these individuals are held in by others in gaming. And lastly, we have a measure of their success, which we've taken to mean to degree to which the games they have made have sold, their tech has proliferated or their ideas have found sway with their peers.

There's a good chance you won't agree with elements of our list and we're happy to hear your thoughts on the matter. Be sure to contact us **@gamesTMmag** on Twitter to offer your feedback.

EVALUATION KEY

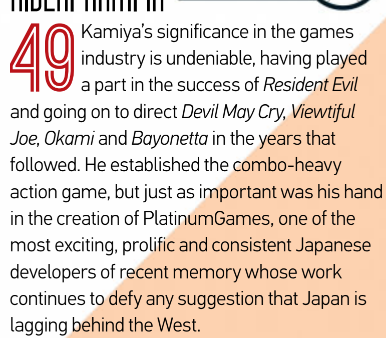


KIM SWIFT

50 Selected by Valve straight out of university along with her team from DigiPen, Swift headed up development of *Portal* and would go on to assist the *Left 4 Dead* series. Her work on *Portal* alone and the way in which it has helped to popularise first-person puzzling, greater humour in games and more would make her a worthy addition to this list. However, having now joined Amazon Games she is at the forefront of a potential new powerhouse of the industry.

HIDEKI KAMIYA

49 Kamiya's significance in the games industry is undeniable, having played a part in the success of *Resident Evil* and going on to direct *Devil May Cry*, *Viewtiful Joe*, *Okami* and *Bayonetta* in the years that followed. He established the combo-heavy action game, but just as important was his hand in the creation of PlatinumGames, one of the most exciting, prolific and consistent Japanese developers of recent memory whose work continues to defy any suggestion that Japan is lagging behind the West.



ANITA SARKEESIAN

48 The Feminist Frequency project, kickstarted and lead by Sarkeesian, has changed the way many talk about and analyse the games industry, elevating the debate beyond graphics and gameplay to issues of social impact and responsibility. It's the kind of high-level analysis that is common in literature, movies and TV, but has been too uncommon in gaming. And now, questions about representation in every game from fighters to *FIFA* are the expectation, not the exception as we continue to make gaming for everyone.

FUMITO UEDA

47 Ueda's role in changing the scale and scope of 3D action games through *Ico* and *Shadow Of The Colossus* is undeniable. The approach developers have taken to emergent storytelling and boss designs have been forever changed by his creations. How *The Last Guardian* will impact the industry from here, we really couldn't tell, but the subtlety of Ueda's design philosophy and commitment to perfecting the small details is likely to inspire others once again.





PAULINE JACQUEY





46 The rise of Reflections has been a quiet and unassuming one within Ubisoft, but as we discovered on a studio visit in 2016, the team lead by Jacquey has been a massive contributing factor to some of its parent publisher's most successful games. For instance, Reflections built nearly half of *The Division*, the biggest new IP launch in Ubisoft's history, and is working on the latest *Ghost Recon* game, too. Jacquey's team is impacting some of the biggest releases in the industry.

TAKASHI TEZUKA



45 For more than 30 years, Tezuka has been the director and often-unsung hero of some of Nintendo's greatest hits. From *Super Mario Bros* and *The Legend Of Zelda* to *Star Fox* and *Animal Crossing*, Tezuka continues to be an integral part of some genuinely massive franchises in various important roles. His most recent contributions have been *Super Mario Maker*, which marked his 30th anniversary of working on the original platformer, and *Super Mario Run*, for which he was director.

JASON JONES



44 Any profile of Jones typically begins with reference to his relative lack of public appearances. As a co-founder of Bungie and key architect in both *Halo* and *Destiny*, Jones has done more than most to shape the last 15 years of FPS gaming, but he doesn't take the spotlight that would surely be his if he wanted. We can respect that. But what we respect even more is the way in which he and his company have continued to push for excellence and innovation, always trying to find the fun in projects above all other things.

DAVID CAGE



43 The authorial voice in gaming is a rare thing that only a handful of developers could really claim to have achieved through their credits, but David Cage is one of them. His steadfast belief in gaming as an artform that could push emotional storytelling has lead him to produce some fascinating explorations of game mechanics, character development and structure. When Quantic Dream has a new title in production we know to expect great visuals, strange interfaces and real control over narrative.

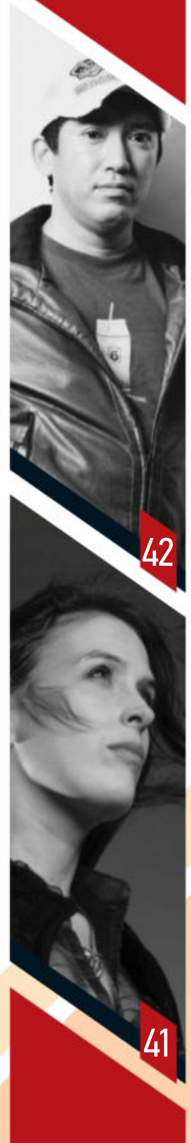




Photo by Jason "Textfiles" Scott

SHINJI MIKAMI

42 The master of the modern horror game, Mikami has managed to redefine the genre more than once with the *Resident Evil* franchise and find a new home for his more macabre ideas with *The Evil Within*. More broadly, his work in third-person action and horror has been massive, whether it was creating a new template for the camera angle in *Resident Evil 4* or setting a benchmark for high-octane fun with *Vanquish*. When Mikami takes the director's chair on a project, everyone who works in his field takes notice.



RHIANNA PRATCHETT

41 As a writer, Pratchett has grown in stature and reputation with each passing game, never attaching herself to a single studio for very long, but making an impression all the same. The most important example of that in recent memory was the reboot of *Tomb Raider*. A tricky proposition that was filled with potential pitfalls, but Pratchett's work in redefining the heroine was exemplary. We expect a lot more from this writer as she begins a new adventure having said goodbye to Lara Croft.

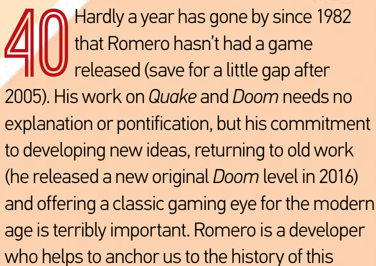


> I would find it very difficult to take on an in-house job because I really enjoy working across multiple projects

Rhianna Pratchett, speaking in games™ 163



JOHN ROMERO



40 Hardly a year has gone by since 1982 that Romero hasn't had a game released (save for a little gap after 2005). His work on *Quake* and *Doom* needs no explanation or pontification, but his commitment to developing new ideas, returning to old work (he released a new original *Doom* level in 2016) and offering a classic gaming eye for the modern age is terribly important. Romero is a developer who helps to anchor us to the history of this industry while still urging everyone forward.





DEBBIE BESTWICK

39 Team17 is a studio that has moved with the times and a large factor in its successful transition from *Worms* developer to indie game chaperone has been the leadership of the savvy Bestwick. Her importance as a role-model goes without saying as the one of very few female studio creators and owners in the business, but what's been impressive in recent years has been Team17's transition to indie publisher, helping games like *The Escapists* and *Yooka-Laylee* reach our consoles and PCs.



JONATHAN BLOW

38 His work on *Braid* alone would likely have gotten Blow acknowledged in these pages ushering in a new era of artful indies on digital platforms. Thankfully, 2016 kicked off with the release of *The Witness*, a fascinating, devilishly simple and infuriating puzzle exploration experience. What's more, Blow has been a fantastic advocate for artful gaming and indie developers on the whole, sharing his favourites and encouraging criticism. His contribution to the community is multi-faceted and continuing to grow.



BRIAN FARGO

37 Fargo's importance to the games industry goes back a few decades now having been a writer on *Bard's Tale*, director of *Wasteland* and producer of *Fallout* to name only a tiny number of his credits. But his more recent work with inXile, establishing a baseline for how crowdfunded games should be managed, as a resurrector of classic franchises and updater of genres with titles like *Wasteland 2* and *Torment: Tides Of Numenera* and as a key figure in new crowdfunding platform Fig, Fargo remains hugely influential.



LUKE CRANE

36 Influential figures in the games industry don't have to be the ones making the games, and one of the most powerful figures of recent years has been Kickstarter's head of games, Luke Crane. Kickstarter's curation and promotion of game projects makes it a powerful force in establishing new indie darlings and Crane's leadership is at the centre of that. His background is actually in boardgames, which makes sense since they continue to dominate the platform, but his importance to up and coming developers cannot be underestimated.

MARK ZUCKERBERG

35 The role of Facebook in the changing face of gaming over the last decade has been immense, delivering casual games to the masses in a way that few would have predicted. But for us it's Zuckerberg's purchase and leadership of Oculus that makes him an influential figure going forward. With the financial clout and media reach he has behind him, he could make Rift into something immense over the next few years. Where he goes, the rest of the industry will need to follow.

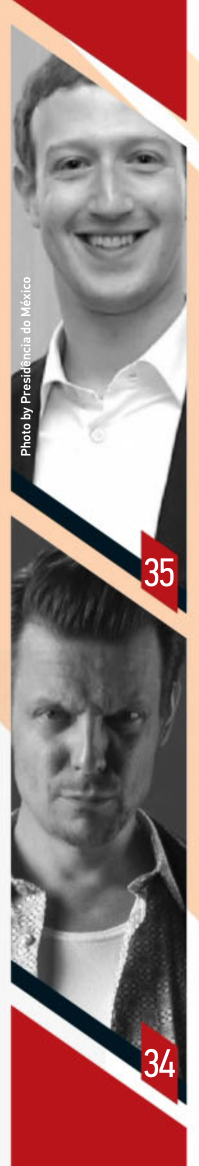
SAM LAKE

34 Many will always think of him as the face of Max Payne, but we tend to think of Lake as one of the great champions of cinematic action, storytelling and gameplay innovation in the industry through his leadership of Remedy Entertainment. The studio has been playing around with narrative techniques even with its breakout, bullet-time shooter and that's only escalated through *Alan Wake* and the trans-media experience of *Quantum Break*. His work on these titles was so fresh and interesting it's sending ripples through the industry.

STEVE "GUINSOO" FEAK

33 There are only a handful of developers who can lay claim to inventing a genre and far fewer who can say they not only invented it, but also made it the most popular game type on the planet, but Feak can. As one of the original developers of the *Defense Of The Ancients* mod for *Warcraft III*, he helped create the modern MOBA. And then, after joining Riot Games he helped to create the modern standard for the genre played by over 100 million people each month, *League Of Legends*.









SEFTON HILL

32 This co-founder of Rocksteady and director of the *Batman Arkham* series takes a lot of credit for how the studio has redefined our expectations for what licensed games can be and how third-person combat is handled in videogames. The *Batman* combat system has proliferated to the extent that a game not using something like it would seem a little strange now. Rocksteady has also delivered some groundbreaking and challenging new experiences and narratives through its Dark Knight adventures under Hill's direction.

KELLEE SANTIAGO

31 Founding thatgamecompany with Jenova Chen in 2006, Santiago would act as producer on the studio's inventive games, but her continued role in supporting indie developers as a producer and consultant means she has been involved in some amazing indie titles of the last decade. She's credited on *Braid, The Unfinished Swan, Dear Esther* and *Gone Home*. Her mission at thatgamecompany was to show that videogames were capable of more than the typical kinds of experiences for players. Now she is spreading that gospel to new projects.

CHRIS AVELLONE

30 Chris Avellone has become a perennial stretch goal target for new Kickstarter RPG campaigns, contributing to *Torment, Pillars Of Eternity, FTL, Wasteland 2* and many more. Avellone has been a tremendous advocate for writing in videogames and his approach has been helped by the fact that he combines it with a fundamental understanding of good game and level design thanks to a background of doing both back in his Interplay days. When we see him attached to a new game, we know to expect something fun.



TIM SCHAFER

29 We've always loved Tim Schafer, but for many years he was the nearly man of the games industry. Funny, smart and inventive as he and his games had been, Double Fine just couldn't seem to find a hit. But with a new model for his studio, embracing the creativity and ideas of his team through small indie releases and crowdfunding, Double Fine has reinvented itself while maintaining a signature wit and voice. And now with Fig, Schafer could help shape the future of game funding too.

RAJA KODURI



28 There are some figures in the games industry whose influence on the games you play every day will not be immediately apparent to you. Raja Koduri is one such figure – as the chief architect of the Radeon Technologies Group for AMD, he's the one in charge of the team that is providing processing power to this generation of consoles. The dominance of the AMD Radeon chip on PS4 and Xbox One makes Koduri a major figure in the industry right now. Whatever comes out from his team next could power the future of gaming.

JENS BERGENSTEN

27 He's the man who inherited an empire when Mojang was bought by Microsoft. Since 2011, Bergensten has been the lead designer and developer on *Minecraft*. Under his leadership, the game has continued to spread to every console and mobile format around the world. While the years and Microsoft's added funding may have taken some of the surprise out of *Minecraft*'s dominance, it has not diminished it at all. What Bergensten leads in this franchise will continue to send ripples through gaming.

JADE RAYMOND

26 Raymond has established herself as one of the most respected producers and studio heads in the business. It's a testament to her continued success that she's been handed the reins to the galaxy far, far away as her brand new team, Motive Studios in Montreal, will be working on *Battlefront 2* with DICE and assisting Amy Hennig and the Visceral team in developing a brand new *Star Wars* action game. Across these two titles, Raymond is likely to have a massive influence on the future of *Star Wars* titles.

> If you set the bar really high and you only manage to do 80 per cent, you still manage to do something that's interesting or different
>
> **Jade Raymond, speaking in games™ 162**





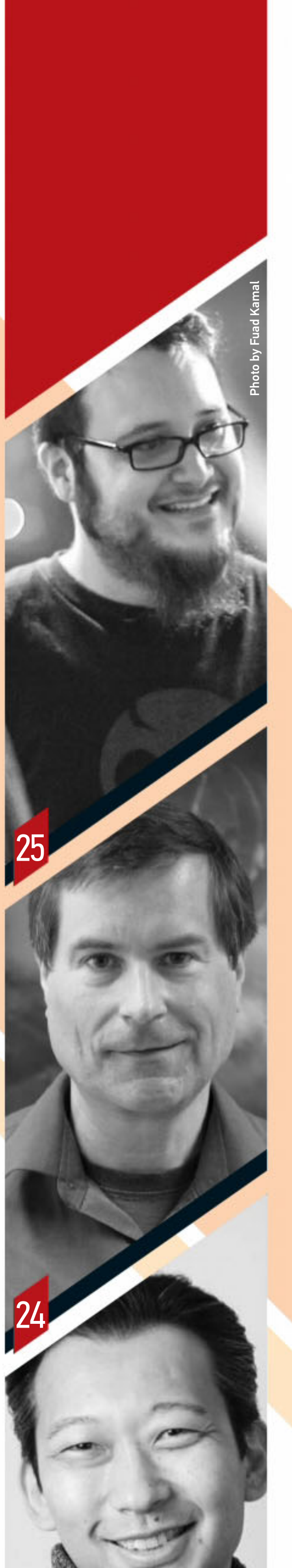


Photo by Fuad Kamal

> It's very easy to self-censor or just turn your game into a turd by trying to appeal to everyone
>
> **Edmund McMillen, speaking in games™ 144**



EDMUND MCMILLEN



25 Through *Super Meat Boy* and *The Binding Of Isaac*, McMillen has been instrumental in changing perceptions of how challenging and irreverent a videogame can be while still managing to create the kind of following and passion that even triple-A blockbusters struggle to muster. McMillen's games come with a unique humour and quirky art style that flies in the face of any argument that only highly polished, 3D action games get any attention or appreciation. All eyes are on what he will do next, whether a sequel to a previous collaboration or something entirely new.

DAVID BRABEN



24 His contribution to the industry through his work on *Elite* alone might have qualified Braben for our list here, but actually it's the way in which Frontier has evolved in the last five years and his part in the creation of Raspberry Pi that makes him so important to gaming today. Through *Elite: Dangerous* he has re-established the space sim in the marketplace. Meanwhile, as one of the six trustees of the Raspberry Pi Foundation, he has championed the device's use in schools and could lay claim to being responsible for the next wave of gaming programmers and coders in the UK as a result.

CHRIS ESAKI



23 Another name that many more gamers should be aware and in reverence of, Esaki can be tracked back as the father of third-person cover mechanics in the modern era. As senior producer at Namco Hometek he lead the making of *kill.switch*, the game credited with first adopting the snap to cover third-person mechanic. But more than that he went on to work as creative director at Microsoft Studios where he worked on *Gears Of War* with Epic, bringing his knowledge of the mechanic with him, as well as overseeing *Mass Effect* and many Kinect titles. For that peak era of the Xbox 360, Esaki was a key development figure.



MARCIN IWIŃSKI

22 As co-founder and joint CEO of the company, Iwiński can't take all of the credit for the rise of CD Projekt Red, but he gets a lot of it. With a background in game distribution, Iwiński and business partner Michał Kiciński looked to bring the kind of games they loved to play to their native land and then looked to turn that experience towards game development, building a studio to make the kind of RPGs they knew their compatriots would love. Since 2002 CD Projekt Red has evolved and, thanks to the leadership of Iwiński, *The Witcher III* has made this studio the RPG creator to watch for the next decade.

NEIL DRUCKMANN

21 Given his association with narrative and storytelling in gaming, you might be surprised to know that Druckmann began his career in programming. He rose up the ranks as a game designer on the *Uncharted* series before taking on creative director on *The Last Of Us* and inheriting *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End*. Through these two games he has established an even more emotionally grounded foundation for Naughty Dog's games. As Naughty Dog has seen key members leave after the success of Drake's adventures, Druckmann is now the studio's shining light and so far his output has been impeccable.

JENNIFER HALE

20 Until fairly recently voice acting was not something that gamers paid much attention to, but these days there are certain names that are an immediate indicator of quality. Jennifer Hale is one such name. She is most famous for voicing Shepard in the *Mass Effect* series, a performance that set a new bar for player-driven performances while also establishing a fantastic baseline personality that makes 'FemShep' so iconic. Beyond that she is something of a chameleon, embodying any number of characters with such conviction, you might not even realise she's there. And what's more she's been a great champion for her profession, elevating the respect we feel for all in her craft.





HIDETAKA MIYAZAKI

19 In the last eight years there aren't many games that have been more talked about and praised than the *Dark Souls* series and their incredible success has not only taken From Software from third-tier mediocrity to triple-A prestige, but also seen its director rise up the ranks to run the studio as a whole. Miyazaki's impact through *Demon's Souls*, *Dark Souls* and *Bloodborne* has been felt across the industry with his peers in game development, being among the first to embrace the idiosyncratic approach to game progression and combat difficulty. It was the kind of epically scaled and skill-driven experience that teams had been too scared to make in the era of accessibility and casual gaming.

19

18

17

EIJI AONUMA

18 Aonuma has been the custodian of Nintendo's most prestigious and respected game series for nearly 20 years now, starting as game systems director on *Ocarina Of Time* and since acting as director, producer and supervisor on pretty much every *Zelda* related release since. In this capacity he has not only managed to maintain a superb level of quality across the series but also helped to push art and design innovation with each passing release. Whether it's successfully migrating the series to Wii, the DS or the 3DS, Zelda continues to deliver must-play experiences on every platform it graces. And with *Breath Of The Wild* we're seeing one of the most ambitious *Zelda*s yet.



KEN LEVINE

17 There are certain figures in the industry who by one means or another have helped to push the conversation forward about what games are and what they can be in the field of entertainment. Levine is one such figure thanks largely to his groundbreaking work on *BioShock* and *BioShock: Infinite*. Both are excellent games while offering different degrees of originality in their mechanics. What was unique in them was the tone of their stories and the respect the games seemed to have for the intelligence of their players. To our minds, it was Levine's *BioShock* that popularised the found-narrative style of story in games today and raised the bar for pacing and construction of worlds.

PHIL SPENCER

16 Spencer has been working at Microsoft for nearly 30 years now and has worked his way up from development of consumer products to general manager of Microsoft Game Studios and now head of Xbox in its entirety. But what has been most notable since he took charge has been the shift of focus and direction for the company away from being a broad multimedia provider to being about games and game makers. This is perhaps thanks to his experience working directly with companies like 343, Rare and Lionhead as Xbox's European studios boss. The mood around the console and company has become much more positive thanks to Spencer's leadership. And this year, Scorpio could change everything.

JOHN CARMACK

15 As a driver of technology, few people in gaming could claim to have had a more consistent impact on the industry than John Carmack. His historical achievements with id Software should need no repetition here, so instead we can focus on what he has done more recently. Since 2013 he has been CTO of Oculus VR, helping to take the Kickstarter project from interesting concept to advanced prototype (the Development Kit 2 or DK2) and, finally, practical commercial release. In his role he has also been a powerful voice for the strength and potential of virtual reality in gaming. Oculus has already said its working on a follow-up to the Rift and Carmack is likely at the forefront of what phase two of VR is going to look like.

BONNIE ROSS

14 The last ten years has flown by, and we know that because it was 2007 when Bonnie Ross helped to establish 343 Industries and head up the studio that was to take the *Halo* franchise forward. The challenge of living up to the legacy of Bungie was a near impossible one and in many respects 343 has had its ups and downs, but in terms of broadening the scope of what *Halo* represents as a media brand, helping to bring it up to date with the latest technology, delivering the kind of multiplayer and eSports experience fans now expect, Ross' leadership has been exemplary. She is, ultimately, in charge of Microsoft's most important gaming property at the moment.



Photo by Official GDC







SHUHEI YOSHIDA

13 The games industry doesn't have many real personalities and even fewer who have made a substantial contribution to the industry. Yoshida has changed what we expect from a videogame executive, especially since the reveal and launch of the PS4. He has made himself available to gamers through social media, acted as a cheerleader for fans of the system he represents and seemingly never been afraid to speak his mind. But even in his day-to-day work he has helped to shape Sony as a modern gaming powerhouse. He was part of the team that helped create Sony's internal studio system and as president of worldwide studios has overseen some of the best games in PlayStation's history.

NOLAN NORTH

12 He's the voice of the modern videogame hero. And the Penguin. And Deadpool. But before we begin falling into all of Nolan North's credits from the last decade, North's real impact comes from more than just being highly employable. His work with Naughty Dog in particular has seen him elevate the role of voice actor to full performance capture artist and in so doing raise the bar for how personality and character can be translated from performer to game. His natural charisma is of course a massive part of his success in this regard, but so is his work ethic. As his comments about voice acting have shown in the past, he thinks of himself as part of the team and he gives everything he can in his performance for those around him.

CLIFF BLESZINSKI

11 Another of the great personalities of gaming, he has been the rockstar of the industry for many years and while he has definitely mellowed in recent years, Bleszinski's brand of brash, in-your-face, high-octane gaming remains strong. As the creative lead behind *Gears Of War* he really kickstarted the last generation of titles, giving everyone a graphical and entertainment benchmark to hit. Now heading up his own studio on his own terms he is playing around with expectations. *Lawbreakers* is not like the other character-driven, team-based arena shooters you've seen of late. Bleszinski has gathered a team of innovators and specialists to make the most engaging, fast-paced and detailed FPS-action experience they can muster.

AMY HENNIG

10 We've been great admirers of the work of Amy Hennig for many years dating back to *Legacy Of Kain*, but it was really *Uncharted 2* that elevated her to the level of industry standard-bearer. Strong and engaging character development has been a consistent element of Hennig's work and this was given full expression through *Among Thieves*' time-jumping narrative and casual, realistic dialogue. This was the moment when Nathan Drake became more than a male Lara Croft and was clearly defined as something entirely his own, for which Hennig must take a lot of credit. While her time at Naughty Dog has come to a close she is arguably now working an even more exciting field, as creative director of Visceral's *Star Wars* action game. We can't think of anyone we would rather have working on such a project.

CORRINNE YU

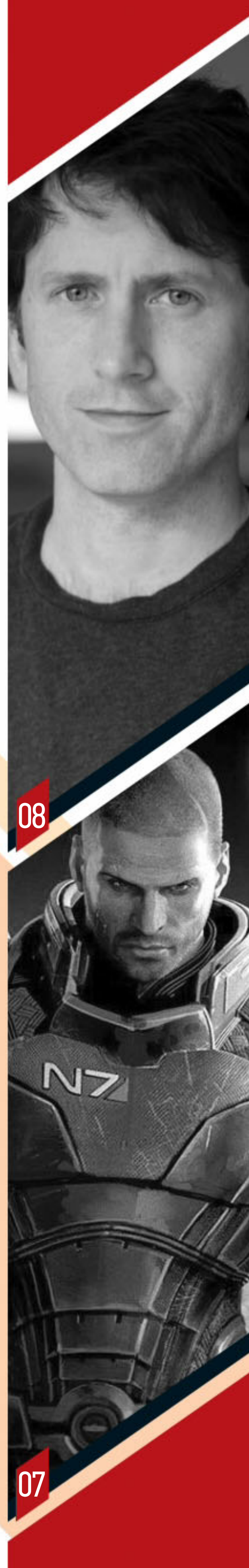
09 If you track the career of Corrinne Yu it's like looking at a list of some of the most technologically important games of the last decade. Her experience as a tech lead goes back to her days with Ion Storm where she built the code base for *Quake 2* among other things. Later she was director of technology for Gearbox Software and was instrumental in heavily modifying Unreal Engine 3 in order to create *Borderlands*' unique art style and aesthetic. If we stopped there that would be impressive, but just before *Borderlands* launched Yu was snapped up by Microsoft Studios as principal engine architect for 343 Industries where she established the technology base for the stunning visuals of *Halo 4*. Her lighting work alone lead to a brand new patent for Microsoft. And now, Yu is principal development manager for Amazon Prime Air, the drone delivery system.

> I already have lots of game ideas floating around in my head, so I know plenty of what I want to do. Maybe play a little bit with VR

Cliff Bleszinski, speaking in games™ 174









> It's one thing to admire Fallout from afar, and another to love it as a developer. It's absolutely one of the best gaming worlds you can create in

Todd Howard, speaking in games™ 137



TODD HOWARD

08 Bethesda has been through a lot of changes in the last 20 years, but in the last 15 or so with the creation of Bethesda Game Studios Todd Howard has been instrumental in the rise of the one of the most prestigious and popular game developers in the world. As project leader and designer on *Morrowind* he was instrumental in establishing the modern brand of Bethesda RPG, but it's been in his role as game director and executive producer of the wildly successful *Fallout 3*, *Skyrim* and *Fallout 4* that Howard has become the guiding creative force and public face of Bethesda's biggest titles. His approach to game design is testing driven and about mastering the basics. And in directing *Fallout Shelter* he has helped to expand the *Fallout* brand to new areas. Whatever comes next from Bethesda will once again be filtered through his vision for gaming.

CASEY HUDSON



07 As a project director at BioWare, Casey Hudson was responsible for some of the studios greatest achievements, not least in leading development of *Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic* and later as the lead and executive producer of the *Mass Effect* trilogy from its conception to the climax of *Mass Effect 3*. Between these four games he has had an incredible impact on RPG design, sci-fi world creation and narrative construction, helping to shape in a massive way how modern role-playing experiences are made. And now, as if all of those achievements weren't enough, Hudson is in an even greater position to help influence the future of game design as Microsoft Game Studios creative director. Since mid-2015, his input will have been felt across the Microsoft first-party portfolio and we may only now begin seeing the results.

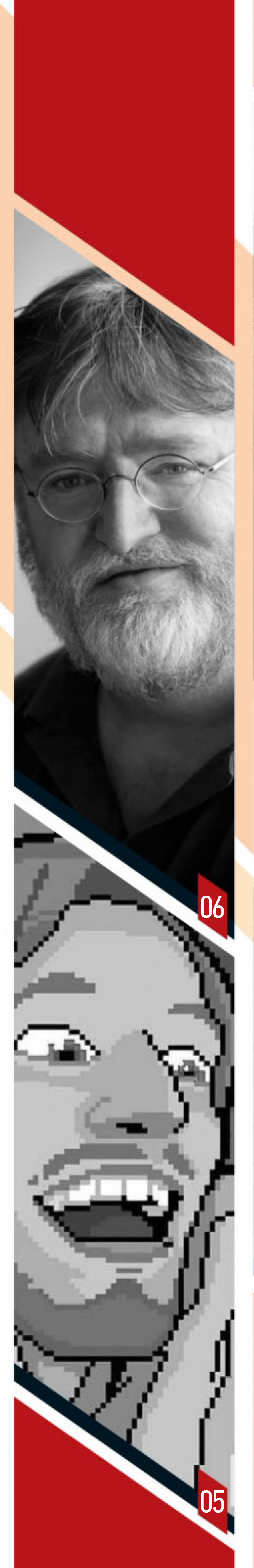
GABE NEWELL

06 Forbes currently measures Gabe Newell's worth as something like $4.1 billion. We'd place his value to the games industry as something closer to priceless. Through Valve, Newell has encouraged and nurtured a team to develop some of the biggest titles in the history of gaming, titles that have changed the ways others make and think about the medium. And as a technology company, Valve has emerged as one of the great innovators, pioneering and standardizing digital distribution through Steam, creating a path of indie developers to find fame and fortune thanks to the Greenlight program and most recently, in collaboration with HTC, creating the high-standard for full-room VR experiences with the Vive. Newell is a true believer in gaming and empowering game-makers and game players and most importantly he's proven that this approach can be massively successful.

PEWDIEPIE

05 With 51 million subscribers and 14 billion video views, there is no voice more potent and more widely heard in the field of gaming than Felix 'PewDiePie' Kjellberg's. The games he plays, talks about, praises and enjoys on his YouTube channel are instantly turned into hits. *Skate 3* famously returned to the top selling charts in the UK four years after it was released in large part thanks to PewDiePie featuring the game in a series of videos. Kjellberg didn't invent the Let's Play video format and wasn't the first gamer to attempt to share and engage other gamers with videos of their experience, but he brought his own unique, often surreal personality to the table, highlighted games that made for the most entertaining viewing experience more than just what was popular and in so doing created something driven by real personality that crossed demographic lines. PewDiePie is a real power in this industry now.





DAN HOUSER



04 In terms of making Rockstar one of the leading developers and publishers in the world whose every game release feels like a seismic event, it's pretty hard to pick between Sam and Dan Houser for this list. It actually seems a little mean to pick only one, but given that Dan Houser is head writer for Rockstar Games and has been responsible for not only co-writing the *GTA* titles since *London 1969*, but also *Bully*, *Red Dead Redemption* and *Max Payne 3*, we're inclined to think of him as the greater creative force. Regardless, the Housers have created something incredible in the last two decades, establishing *Grand Theft Auto* as probably the biggest franchise in the business and setting the standard for sandbox gameplay at the same time. What *GTA* perfects and popularises, everyone ends up copying. Influence like that is difficult to match.

HIDEO KOJIMA



03 What do we give Kojima more credit for? As a developer he has navigated three decades of game design at the top of his profession, advanced stealth gameplay as a premier genre and pushed technological standards through his game engines. However, what we most admire Hideo Kojima for is transplanting the auteurial, cinematic voice from movies to videogames. He brought his passion for the escapism and visual language of film and worked again and again to translate that to the world of gaming. Over the years he helped to establish the role of the cutscene, motion capture, performance capture and more in his pursuit of cinematic realism through *Metal Gear Solid*. Now, having toured the globe looking for an engine, he is looking to deliver *Death Stranding*, a game that promises to release whatever leash was still left from his time at Konami. It could be a game changer.

> I wanted to show people that Japanese high-end games are still worth playing and that big Japanese games still have a future

Hideo Kojima, speaking in games™ 145






MARK CERNY

02 Cerny has been in the game development world for a long time and in those years has worn a number of different hats behind the scenes, seemingly capable of mastering any role he takes on. Working with Sony for last 20 years he has had a hand in *Crash Bandicoot*, *Spyro*, *Ratchet & Clank*, *Uncharted*, *Killzone* and more. In that time he has helped to teach his 'method' for game design that emphasises concepting and brainstorming in the early stages and brutally honest playtesting as early as possible. As such he could be considered responsible for the high quality of output from so many Sony affiliated studios. But just as important in recent years was his contribution to the PS4, on which he was lead architect. Only an individual of his unique experience as a game developer and technical lead could have created such a game developer friendly console with so much power. He deserves a lot of credit for Sony's recent dominance.

02

SHIGERU MIYAMOTO

01 It's no great surprise to see this name at the top of our list of influential people in gaming. He is the godfather of the medium. A true creative force, even to this day. Someone whose involvement in a game instantly promises ideas, fun and creativity. Wikipedia credits him as having directed, designed and produced over 150 games since his career began back in 1979, and to this day he continues to be involved in new releases, most notably continuations of his classic creations like *Super Mario Bros* and *The Legend Of Zelda*. We could list his credits for several pages, but his influence on the games industry goes beyond the titles he helped to make. More important has been his philosophy of what gaming should mean to all of us.

By continually dipping back into his own childhood and the simple pleasures of the world for inspiration, few could claim to have championed the concept of gaming for everyone more than him. His driving vision has always been making games that are fun first and as accessible as possible, finding universal truths that we can all enjoy. He has made sure that his titles make the best use of their hardware, coming up with inventive concepts and twists on the familiar that bring smiles to our faces. He has set the tone of what Nintendo means to gamers for nearly 40 years, mentored some of its most inventive game-makers and still produces amazing titles to this day. No one has been more inspirational in this business than Shigeru Miyamoto.

> "We really try not to think too much about what's trendy right now or who are the characters that are popular"
>
> **Shigeru Miyamoto, speaking in games™ 165**

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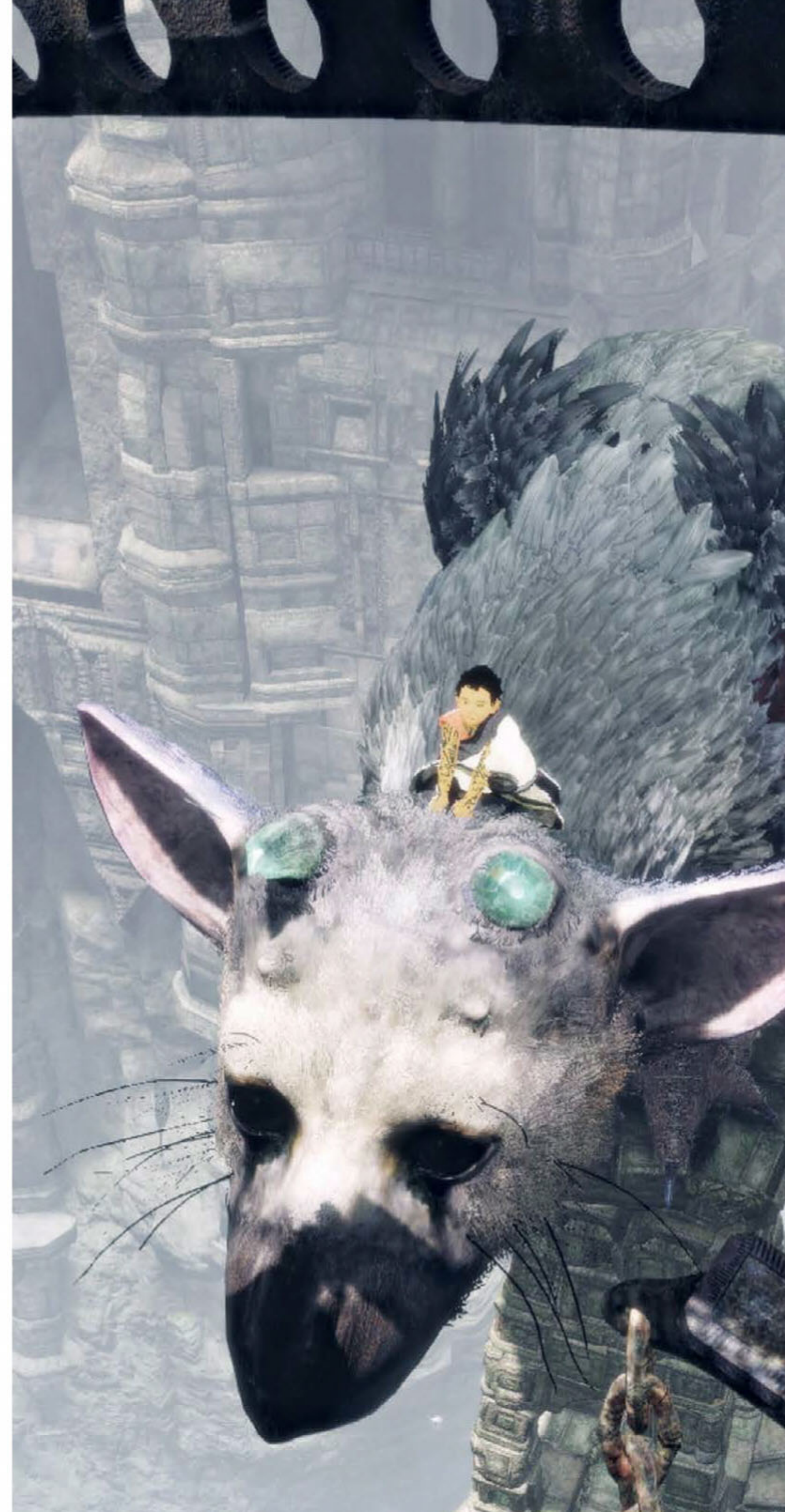


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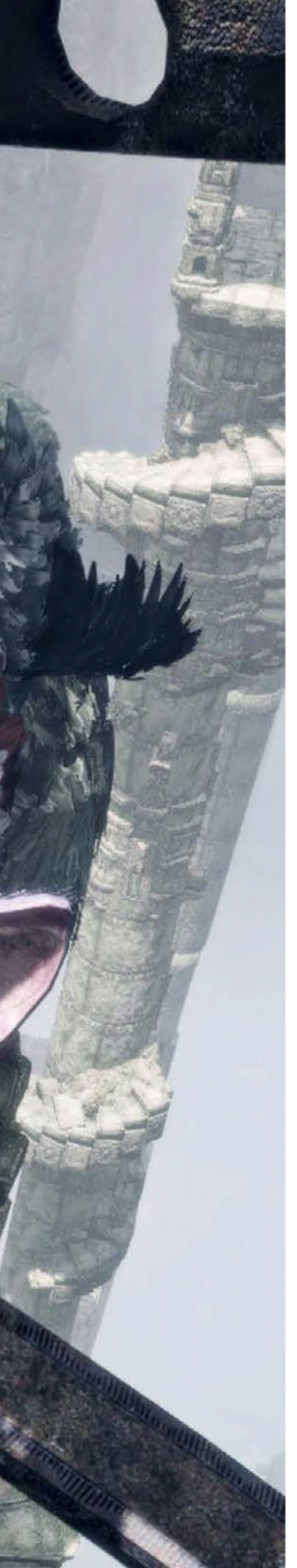
Reviews



68

THE LAST GUARDIAN

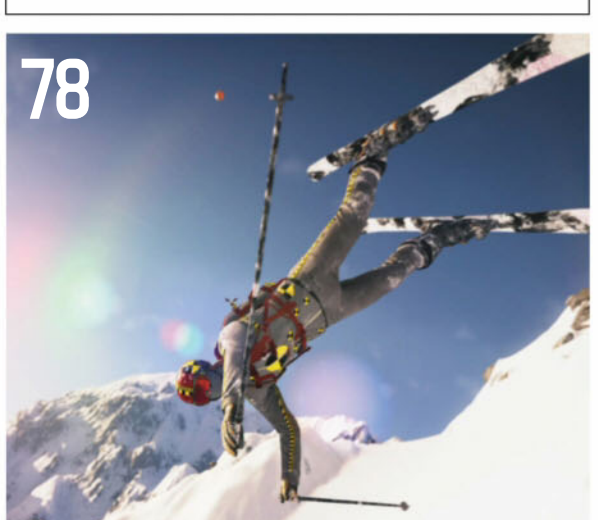
It's been a long, long wait, so can this follow up to *Ico* and *Shadow Of The Colossus* live up to its own intimidating legacy?

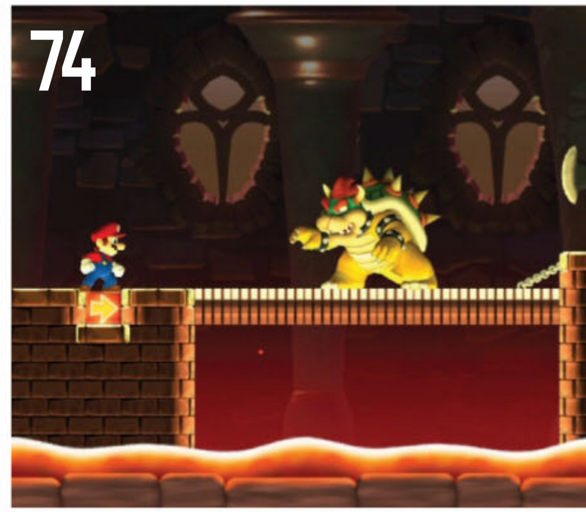


THE AVERAGE

Three of the numbers in a ten-point scale are of greater importance than the others: five, seven, and of course, ten. Some publications would fool you into believing that a 7/10 game is average, but that just doesn't make sense to us. **games™** reviews videogames on their entertainment value, and so any title that simply performs to an adequate standard will receive a 5/10. Simple. The elusive ten is reserved for games of incredible, irrefutable quality, but please be aware that a score of ten in no way professes to mean perfection. Perfection is an unattainable goal, and on a ten-point scale nothing should be unattainable. Again, simple. Our reviews are not a checklist of technical features with points knocked off for flaws, neither are they a PR-pressured fluff-fest – we'd never let that happen, and besides you'd smell it a mile off. And finally, the reviews you find within these pages are most certainly not statements of fact, they are the opinions of schooled, knowledgeable videogame journalists designed to enlighten, inform and engage. The gospel according to **games™**.

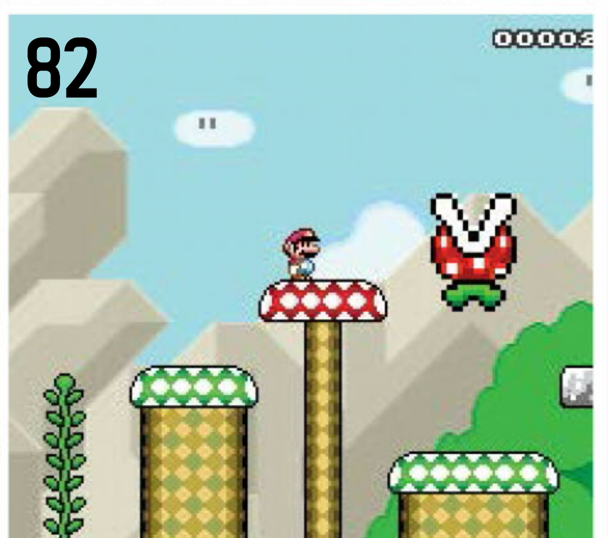












AGREE/DISAGREE?

games™ is always right. But that doesn't stop some people disagreeing. Think we've got a review horribly wrong? Or did we nail it?

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@gamesTMmag
#gamestmiswrong #gamestmisright



SUSPENSION OF DISBELIEF IS NOT JUST BENEFICIAL TO THE GAME – IT'S ESSENTIAL

BARRELS OF FUN

While the tubs of dinner that conveniently litter the landscape are used more as a stall tactic to slow the game down in places than anything else, it's good to know that they're not entirely useless outside of those occasions when Trico lies down and refuses to move until it has eaten EXACTLY three barrels' worth of chow. As you replay the game, your total number of barrels discovered and fed to Trico is tallied, with cosmetic rewards dished out at regular intervals. Some of these serve as subtle (and some not-so-subtle) shout-outs to the studio's other games, while others let you play around with the beast's appearance rather than that of the boy. It's frivolous, sure, but at least there's *some* reason to play the game more than once, however small.





BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

The Last Guardian

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS4
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: Japan Studio/ GenDESIGN
PRICE: £49.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

Left: The first time it happened, grabbing Trico's tail after a failed jump was breathtaking. Finding out that it was scripted rather than dynamic soured the experience, though

BETTER THAN

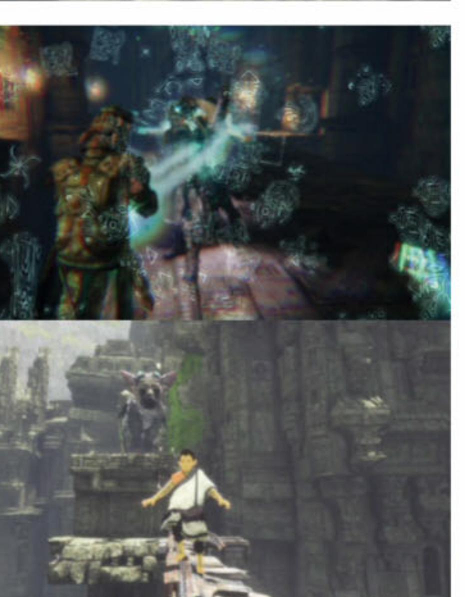


DUKE NUKEM FOREVER

WORSE THAN



FINAL FANTASY XV



Left: Precarious balancing acts are common, and it's always a little sad to hear Trico yelping at you when it realises that it can't follow

We've done all kinds of difficult things in the many years since this magazine first appeared on the shelves. We managed to put every *Souls* game to bed long before guides existed or summoning for help was an option; we solved *The Witness* and *Fez* when there were no YouTube guides to lend a helping hand; through the fire and flames, we carried on to delicious five-star victory when even the best pretend guitar players in the business were struggling. Though it may sound like it, this isn't just shameless bragging (although any little we can do to allay the falsehood that all of us lot are bad at games can't hurt), rather a spot of perspective. Because of all the hardships we've encountered and crazy difficult tasks we've faced in the 15 years since this magazine began, settling on a decimal evaluation of *The Last Guardian* easily sits among the most ludicrously tough things we've ever had to do.

Much of the problem comes back to the age-old 'are videogames art?' discussion that has been raging more or less since pixels dared to challenge their more established peers of the pencil and the paintbrush. As an artistic work, few could deny that *The Last Guardian* is a beautiful, evocative and often powerful piece, but where do we draw the line when it comes to critiquing this, or indeed any other such game? Because when judged on the ground of what makes a videogame great, it's quite frankly a mess.

Between a camera that refuses to acknowledge that *Mario 64* ever happened and a framerate that can't even keep it together on the most powerful console on the market (Lord have mercy on your eyes if you don't have a Pro), technical issues plague the game and constantly work against just how pretty it otherwise is. For a game that has been in development hell for the best part of a decade and has even survived a generational shift, it's actually surprising how good it looks. Vistas are stunning, Trico puts in an impressive performance as The Beast and animation in general is incredible, although even this quality animation brings issues of its own with the way it is implemented.

The problem is, that wonderfully choreographed movement, pretty as it may be, comes at the expense of interactivity. The nameless kid you control frequently gets lost in animation loops that can't be broken, every change of direction or slight incline another excuse for the animation team to show you something they think is cool when all you really want is to carry on playing a game without being shown another Vine of a kid falling over. Older readers will know what we mean when we refer to this as '*Rise Of The Robots* Syndrome' – the much-hyped fighter prided itself on how slick its movements were but by stealing so much time from players, you never truly felt in control and the game ended up frustratingly unresponsive. Same deal here. The kid scampers, lurches and stumbles all over the place, something that seems to have been intended as a device to make him more believable as an everyman character rather than a hero. But when he effortlessly takes to highwire performances over certain-death drops, swings from ropes and chains above bottomless pits without a care in the world, and faultlessly defeats inch-wide ledges without even the vaguest hint of failure, those other incompetencies are just highlighted and made to look ridiculous, and that just makes them even more annoying and intolerable.

It doesn't help that this kid has a hulking great suit of Plot Armour. The story is narrated – poorly, it must be said, unless you're a huge fan of statements of the obvious – by him in the future, so you know nothing awful can befall him at any point. Narration in general feels like a step back for a team that relied so heavily (and so expertly) on subtlety and environmental storytelling, although it's not easy to determine whether it's the device itself or the poor implementation that is really not working here. So the boy is safe,

MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

HOLD ON TIGHT: Going from having a dedicated button for grabbing ledges, ropes and creature hides in *Shadow Of The Colossus* to having the kid automatically latch on (or not) haphazardly feels like a real step backwards.

as is Trico, as the creature won't do anything that may put it in peril unless an impending cutscene demands as much. A ledge crumbles, it's preordained; a fall happens while you're riding the creature, you know it's all fine or the narrator wouldn't have been able to set up the fallacy in the first place. Trico's disobedience has been flagged by some as an issue, but it really isn't after the first couple of hours – the wild beast is understandably a little unsure about following the orders of a tiny man-thing, and that works just fine mechanically, even if it can be a little frustrating to try and coax the beast into solving a puzzle you worked out ages ago.

There's literally not a spot of peril to be seen in terms of gameplay, or at least there wouldn't be if the platforming mechanics were actually good. Awkward controls, an abysmal camera and those aforementioned animation loops, all serve to make navigation a genuine chore at worst and tolerable at best, and anyone who suggests that's an attempt at realism would do well to replay the game and see just how well this scampering butterchild somehow manages to fling himself effortlessly across death-defying tightropes when he still can't scale an ankle-high ledge without falling over. Not even the armoured soldiers that loiter unthreateningly can bring any sense of panic, fear or dread. Combat, if you can call it that, amounts to just waiting around for Trico to slap these suits silly and even if they do manage to grab the kid, you just mash buttons while they try to cart him off to a portal (which they never once managed to reach for us) Yorda-style, which eventually makes them just fall over. You can chuck vases at them, barge into them, even behead them if you can knock them down, but these 'last resort' tactics just feel completely unnecessary when they're generally so unthreatening that there's nothing to stop you just running around avoiding them or waiting for Trico to do its thing and clean house. As in many other situations, Trico can often feel like an essential tool that follows you around because you feed it rather than a genuine beast with its own motivations.

Such suspension of disbelief is important to bring up as it's not just beneficial to the game – it's essential. To fully enjoy *The Last Guardian,* you need to be able to entirely buy into it, and it doesn't make that easy at times. It's like a puppet show that uses thick wool in place of strings or cables and while some will be able to see past that, others obviously won't. And if you don't buy into Trico as an actual creature, the game has little else to offer aside from being quite pretty when it runs properly. If you clear that hurdle first go, then good for you – you'll certainly enjoy the game more than most – but failure to connect with the creature leaves little but a pretty poor platform adventure game with an unreliable sidekick. If you can see through the smoke and mirrors, there's precious little to hold your attention and everything just falls to pieces.

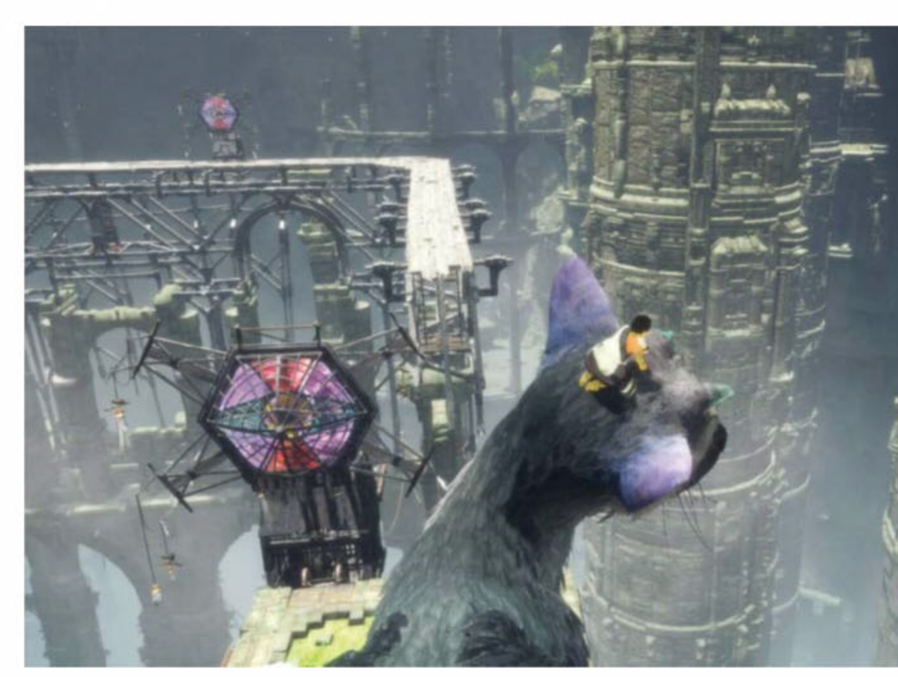
This continues into the world as well. It's genuinely frustrating how one-dimensional the seemingly open playgrounds actually are – while they may play at being large, free areas, not once is there more than one solution to a problem and however inventive you may get, invisible walls and manufactured hurdles

FAQs

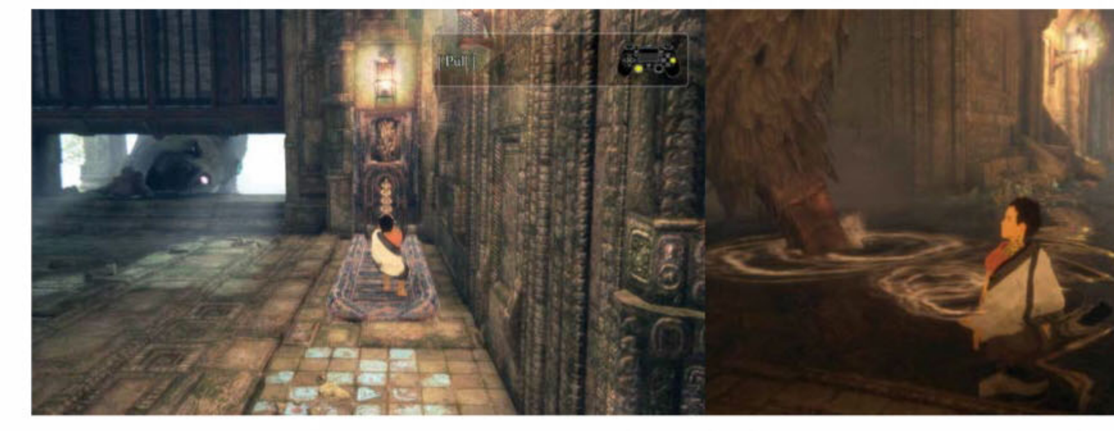
Q. HOW LONG IS IT?
Probably about 12-15 hours on your first run, depending on how much Trico feels like acting out the solutions to the simple physics-based puzzles.

Q. IS A PRO ESSENTIAL?
Not exactly, but played on an original console, the game suffers more frequent and much more severe framerate drops.

Q. MORE LIKE ICO OR SOTC?
It's a mix of elements from both, although it feels closer to the team's earlier title… even at the expense of some of the improvements *Colossus* gave us.



Right: Those stained glass panels make Trico go a bit crazy. Good thing whoever left them here made it incredibly easy to just dump them into the abyss…

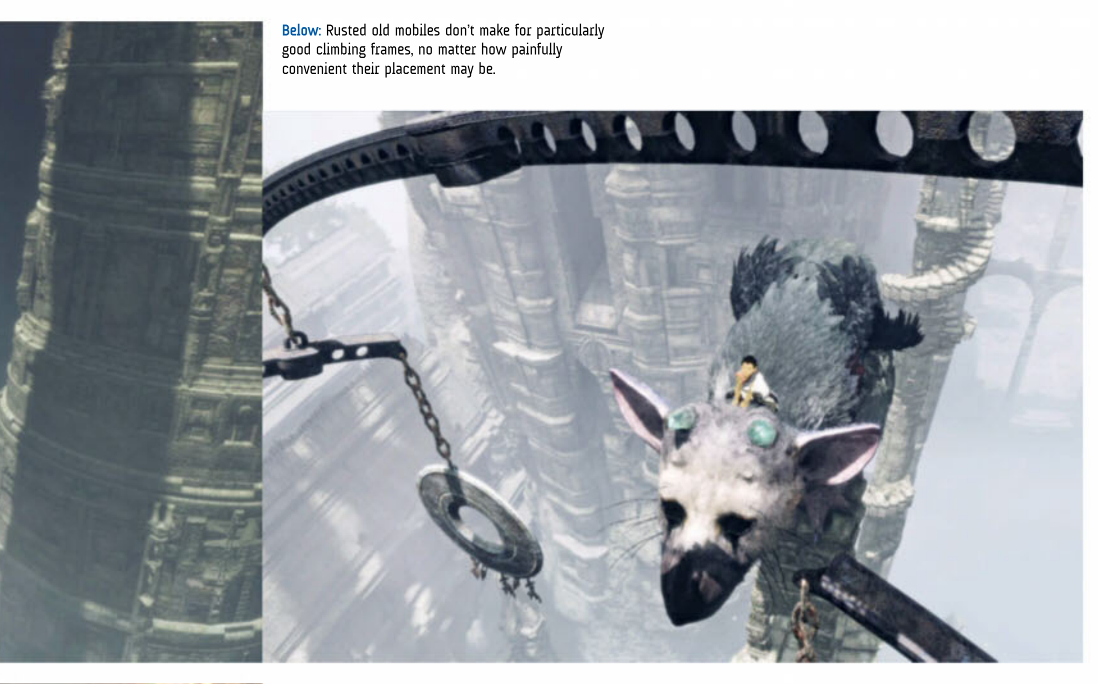




Above: The 'crawl through gap, pull lever to let Trico in' gameplay loop feels tired after the first few times, but it still keeps coming

THE WILD BEAST IS UNDERSTANDABLY A LITTLE UNSURE ABOUT FOLLOWING THE ORDERS OF A TINY MAN-THING, AND THAT WORKS JUST FINE MECHANICALLY

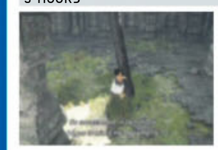
Below: Rusted old mobiles don't make for particularly good climbing frames, no matter how painfully convenient their placement may be.



TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

15 MINS



The opening is beautiful and your introduction to Trico is powerful. Just seeing how the beast moves as you scurry around it looking for food for it to eat is stunning.

3 HOURS



It's around this point that Trico really starts to understand and obey the boy, as is explained with a typically patronising piece of narration. Combining commands feels smart and natural.

10 HOURS

As you weave back through areas you've already explored performing the same tasks you've done time and again, the magic wears off. It just starts to feel tedious.



THE RIDE OF YOUR LIFE

In the later stages of the game, when Trico becomes more trusting and areas grow more confusing in their crumbling architecture, the easiest thing to do it just hop aboard your feathery friend and let it wander around in the hope of finding the right route. More often than not, it'll at least point you in the right direction eventually and failing that, the narrator will usually chip in after a while with a hint of his own about how he and his companion made progress. There's a trophy for hearing every one of these lines (plus all the incidental ones, many of which seem to be missable) and even though there's a button for 'contemplation' (read: hearing hints), it more often than not just repeats one that is long since unhelpful rather than something new and useful.



will still be in the way until you work out what actually has to happen, and then eventually manage to *make* it happen. It's a fantasy world as seen through the lens of early an *Tony Hawk's* level design, a world clearly built out around the tools the player has to get around at the expense of believability, one where the cruel passage of time has been kind enough to leave exactly one path that can only be conquered with the combined skills of a small slippery child and a 12-metre chickencat. That's not to say that linearity is bad by nature, rather that it just feels a little uncomfortable when the theme of the game is supposed to be something more natural. Pausing play to scavenge food for a hungry beast only works so many times before you have to sit back and ask why said hungry beast couldn't have scored its own dinner – the barrels you repeatedly have to deliver are often within reach and a wild animal would obviously just find and take them rather than relying on table service from the date it just met.

None of this is to say that the game is incapable of delivering memorable highlights, however, and it manages just that in spite of its flaws, with a selection of impressive set-pieces. Even though the needle on the Perilometer seldom budges, there are still times when you can't help but grin when the good guys come out on top, even though the outcome was never really in doubt. There are scenes towards the end that buck this trend in powerful and moving fashion but without flirting with spoilers, suffice to say the actual ending fails to properly deliver on the promise of those events leading up to it.

For all its flaws, it's a small miracle that the game exists at all and after all this time – after years of wondering whether *The Last Guardian* might be just as mythical as the beast it portrays – there's a sense of wonder and genuine thrill to just holding a copy or picking up a controller. If the game has been on your wishlist all these long years, this thrill will likely gel with the creature itself to help you buy into the illusion the game requires to hide its shortcoming behind, and you'll probably love it. There's a lot to love, really – it's just marred by clumsy controls, one of the worst cameras in recent memory and some odd design choices. Provided you can form a strong enough bond with Trico that the curtain never drops to reveal the rusty old cogs that make the game tick, *The Last Guardian* is a beautiful and unique experience. But the second anything causes that curtain to budge, it becomes clear that it just isn't very good at the fundamentals of videogame mechanics, and the beast is slain.

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

CREATURE FEATURE: Trico is clearly the star of the show, a loveable beast with which it's possible for players to create a bond. Despite the game's obvious shortcomings elsewhere, this aspect is undeniably impressive.

VERDICT 6/10

AN ARTISTIC DELIGHT BUT A TECHNICAL SHAMBLES



Above: Stills really don't do justice to *Dead Rising*'s visuals. Taken in isolation, textures and character models tend to have a jagged appearance. When seen in full flow, with hundreds of zombies onscreen, the effect is much more impressive.

THERE'S SOMETHING ROTTEN IN WILLAMETTE

Dead Rising 4

Like an old joke incapable of eliciting anything more than a snicker from its audience, there's something that's just a little tired about *Dead Rising 4*. All the right ingredients are here, from the series' signature over-the-top weaponry, to its endless undead hordes. But there's a distinct whiff of something stale – and it isn't just the zombies.

Overly-repetitive gameplay and a distinct feeling of déjà vu have their parts to play. But it's the way the game has been constrained, rather than being given attempts to expand it, that is most concerning. Indeed, the case could be made that *Dead Rising 4* marks the least ambitious entry into the series so far.

That's not to say there aren't high points to shout about in *Dead Rising 4*. The return of Frank West (who has been MIA) is complemented by genuinely funny one-liners. Frank's presence injects some much-needed comedy value to the general evisceration of zombies that has been sorely missing from the series of late. The same can be said about the introduction of ever more bizarre weaponry with which to battle the undead – everything from flame-throwing dinosaur masks to acid-spewing Father Christmas toys.

This attempt to get back to the series' slapstick roots will undoubtedly please long-standing fans. But where the developer has given with one hand, it has taken away with the other. Where before, players were forced to hit timed deadlines in order to progress through the game, here the decision has been taken to remove these deadlines. The idea was presumably taken with a view to letting players explore the Willamette sandbox (probably more accurately described as a toy box) at their leisure. But the absence of this deadline-driven mechanic robs the *Dead Rising*-formula of its unique drive.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox One
OTHER FORMATS: PC
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Capcom Vancouver
PRICE: £49.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1 (1-4 Online)
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

> YOU KNOW SOMETHING'S NOT RIGHT WHEN YOU ROUND A CORNER TO SEE HUNDREDS OF ZOMBIES AND YOUR FIRST THOUGHT'S 'OH, NOT AGAIN...'

The time limits imposed in previous games might have been divisive; with the stress of getting to certain areas within certain times critiqued just as much as it with lauded. But by opting to scrap the system – rather than hone and perfect it – *Dead Rising 4* has to depend entirely on its gameplay and environment. The problem is that neither is sufficiently strong to sell the game.

Tearing through countless undead is a guilty pleasure of excesses at first. The trouble is that, much like the Festive period in which the game is set, you wouldn't want such gluttony for 365 days of the year. Chopping down zombie after zombie eventually becomes a chore, no matter what fantastical weapon you have equipped. Worse is the

FAQs

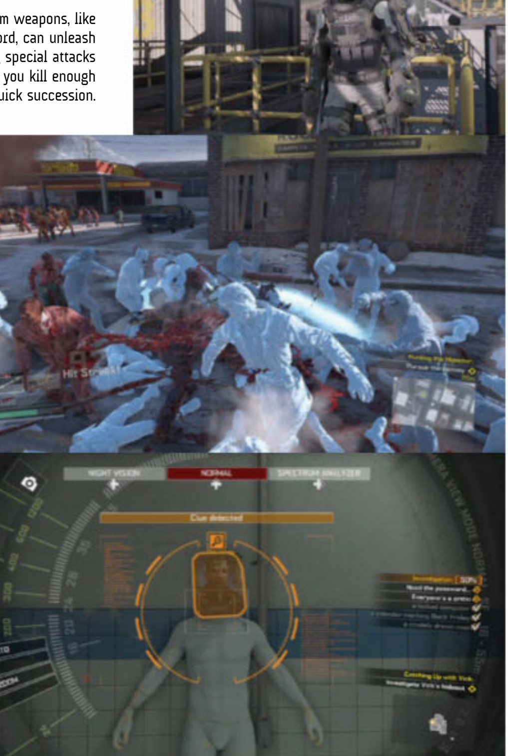
Q. CAN FRANK UP-SKILL?
Yes, skill points are gained upon completing objectives and can be spent on health, stamina and attack-based upgrades.

Q. IS ANYWHERE SAFE?
Hidden emergency shelters are plentiful, though they must be cleared of zombies before being declared safe havens.

Q. HAS ANYONE ELSE IN THE TOWN SURVIVED?
Yep, you'll come across random survivors in need of help. Your reward for assisting them will often be new weapons.



Left: Frank West might be better known to us as a zombie killer, but his day job is actually investigative journalist. As such, players are encouraged to snap as many photos as possible as they play – including the odd selfie.



Right: Occasional encounters with exo-suit sporting black ops soldiers provide some relief from fighting the endless legions of undead.

Below: Custom weapons, like this ice sword, can unleash devastating special attacks whenever you kill enough hostiles in quick succession.

feeling that the zombies pose no threat. If Frank suffers damage he can easily restore himself to full health by consuming one of the many medical items (or even bottled beers) that litter the environment.

Attempts have been made to spice up encounters, though with questionable success. 'Fresh' infected – a new type of zombie that charge at the player like something out of *28 Days Later* – are rendered toothless due to Frank's devastating array of weaponry. Elsewhere, gun-toting hostile survivors and military forces don't feature in large-enough numbers to ever become a true threat. If we died while playing *Dead Rising 4* it was only ever due to failing to notice our health was particularly low, rather than because of any true challenge.

Difficulty is far from everything, and all could have been redeemed if the environment itself was particularly unique, or if it was more interesting. The truth, however, is that the environments are lacklustre.

After a brief soiree in Willamette's mall (by far the most interesting locale), Frank's adventure takes him out into the streets. Where the mall was a lovingly crafted sideshow – highlights including a pirate ship and go-kart track – Willamette proper is a drab affair of dark streets and monotonous zombie slaying. You know something's not right when you round a corner to see a crowd of zombies numbering in the hundreds and, rather than gleefully tearing into them, your first thought's 'Oh, not again…'.

At least the game's plot provides some relief. Frank's attempts to expose a shadowy black-ops conspiracy provide some reason to get from point A to point B. Meanwhile the odd crime scene investigation, in which players must find and photograph clues, provide much needed respite from the rinse-and-repeat nature of the gameplay.

Alas, the same can't be said of the game's tacked-on multiplayer. It takes its inspiration from *Left 4 Dead* as it tasks four survivors to make it to a safe room. But, where Valve's classic nurtured cooperation, *Dead Rising 4*'s online offering is more about amassing a greater score than that of your fellow players.

Typically this leads to each player taking to a new stage with little thought for their other players, and what might have been a tense affair degenerates into yet more wanton zombie slaughter. Because of this, the online multiplayer has all the same limitations of the single-player campaign and feels like more of the same rather than something new.

An attempt to make it more interesting, by introducing character classes (a hand-to-hand veteran, gun expert, bombs specialist and medic), also backfires. The vast majority of players opt for the hand-to-hand weapons veteran, meaning most games simply have four versions of the same character model running around. Put simply, the multiplayer is neither ambitious, nor is it well implemented and is a short-lived distraction at best.

It's disappointing that *Dead Rising 4* sees the series take a backward step. While there's gory fun to be had, the failure to replace the time-limit based gameplay with any kind of alternative mechanic is a mistake. Even the biggest fan of zombie-killing frivolity will find that the endless slaughter wears thin eventually, and most will hit that particular wall much sooner.

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

CAMERA MAN: Photographing the zombie outbreak is encouraged, with the goriest photos unlocking extra skill points.
SELFIES: Frank can turn the camera on himself too, and even grab unsuspecting enemies for a close-up.

WAR MACHINES

Frank's journey takes him out into Willamette's streets, and what better way to get around than in a weaponised car? As with his handheld arsenal, blueprints hold the key to building custom vehicles such as a hearse that catapults zombies into their brethren and a snow mobile that sprays out liquid nitrogen. Each vehicle has an energy bar that depletes as you mow down the zombie hordes. Most though are tough enough to withstand crunching their way through thousands of undead. The price of such power is that progressing between locations becomes a little too easy, to the point of feeling unnecessary. Yet another way in which *Dead Rising*'s challenge is undermined by design choice.

BETTER THAN

DYNASTY WARRIORS 8: EMPIRES



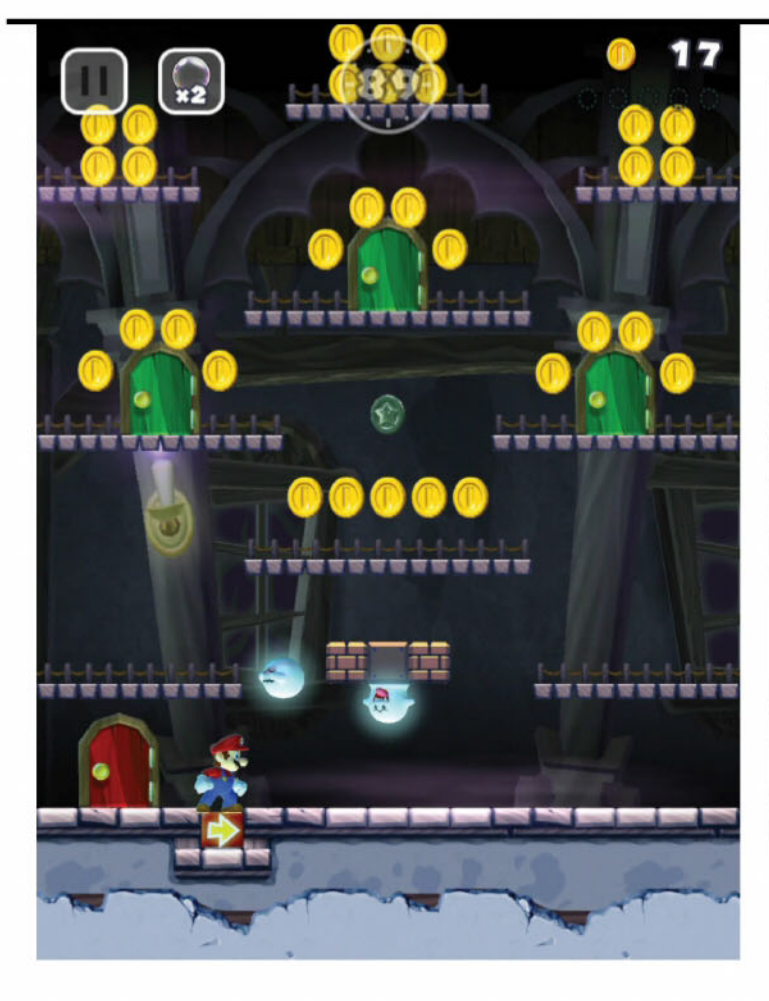
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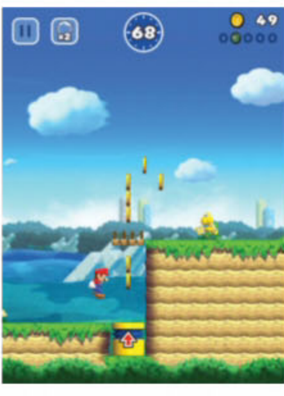


DYING LIGHT: THE FOLLOWING

VERDICT 6/10

A ZOMBIE KILLER LACKING A SPARK OF LIFE











Left: Pause pads like this one are a great chance to take a quick breath and plan your next leap, especially when black coins are involved. Above: Rally runs are always incredibly tense and competitive, one false leap can cost you a life and a chunky slice from your precious Toad army.

IT'S NOT ABOUT COST, IT'S ABOUT CONTENT

Super Mario Run

Many thought Mario would never be able to heave his chubby form onto mobile devices and yet here we are, watching Nintendo's mascot run endlessly across our iPhone and iPad screens.

Don't judge Nintendo's first proper foray into mobile gaming just because it comes in the form of an constant runner. *Super Mario Run* is a surprising twist on the well-established genre, delivering a mobile game that oozes classic Nintendo charm. Most of which comes from the look and the feel of the game, even if you only opt for the free tier, rather than the complete £7.99 option.

The graphics and soundtrack are *Super Mario* at its best, colours popping beautifully from the screen, and the left to right gameplay is a nod to the best kind of nostalgia.

The gameplay is perfectly suited to mobile devices too, with Mario running until you tap for a short jump or hold for a longer one. Using just these two movements, you can wall jump, vault over enemies and take advantage of 'pause pads' so you can plan your next move.

Tour mode is initially your mainstay, as you'll be running through various *Super Mario* worlds, exploring how an constant runner Mario game works. You'll only get the first world (of six) unless you fork out the full price, but it's still enough to keep you busy.

Each level has three tiers, with different coloured coins strategically positioned about the world that requires Mario to run, jump and flick to different points in order to nab them.

However, if you're not an obsessive completionist, Tour mode can quickly feel repetitive as you're merely jumping and running through 24 different levels with similar hurdles.

Thankfully, you've also got the multiplayer Rally mode, where you compete against other *Super Mario Run* racers asynchronously. Here, the gameplay evolves from simple jumps, to acrobatic spins, rolls and more, all executed with perfectly-timed taps of the screen.

Performing such feats, collecting coins and taking out enemies combine for an overall Rally score. Besting your foe means nabbing all the Toads you've impressed, but also all theirs too. It's surprisingly satisfying.

Toads then populate The Kingdom, which is basically a place to spend coins on mini-games, decorations and other nostalgic tat.

Although Nintendo has introduced a few new features since release, *Super Mario Run* still feels like it's missing something. It looks and feels like a proper Mario game, but it can quickly become so tiresome that we no longer play. It's all too easy to exhaust Tour Mode and the Kingdom has no staying power.

The free tier will be plenty for most Super Mario Runners, and for the full investors, you'll soon be reduced to a few daily Rally runs.

DETAILS

FORMAT: iOS
OTHER FORMATS: Android
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Nintendo/DeNA
PRICE: Free/£7.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

BETTER THAN
TEMPLE RUN 2



WORSE THAN
ALTO'S ADVENTURE



MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

MISSING MODE: Without the strongest and most consistent of 3G or Wi-Fi signals, you can't play it at all. The lack of offline mode is a significant mistake for Nintendo's first 'mobile' game.

VERDICT 6/10

A CLASSIC NINTENDO GAME RUINED BY REPETITIVENESS.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Kinmoku
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £2.49
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

IS THERE A HAPPY ENDING?

One Night Stand

Awkwardness is the name of the game in *One Night Stand.* You wake up, naked, disoriented and hungover, in a strange bed – and when you turn over, there's some woman next to you. No matter what you do, she runs out of the room to throw up. So far, so good.

As the game progresses, you're offered a few limited choices – do you snoop around the girl's room to find out her name to pretend you totally remember her, and save her the humiliation of realising you don't? Do you try to find out more about her so the conversation isn't so awkward? Or would you just like to leave as soon as possible? All of these options are available to you, but all of them will also probably make everything way worse. You'll call her the wrong name, ask about something she doesn't want to talk about, or she'll catch you leaving and feel hurt.





The game is designed to be played over and over, so that you can unlock new endings, and find out more about the girl and the situation in increments. The problem is that the multiple endings undermine the story – it sometimes feels like you're trying to manipulate this girl into liking you, rather than just experiencing a story, as if someone's feelings about you are a win state. Still, *One Night Stand*'s brutal honesty and unflinching awkwardness are strangely refreshing in a market that rarely tells stories on this level of intimacy.

Above: The sketchy, rotoscoped style is reminiscent of DS game, *Hotel Dusk*, which is a really nice and unique touch for an indie game. It is all rather yellow, though, and that can feel a little sickly at times

BETTER THAN

OXENFREE





WORSE THAN

HOTEL DUSK

VERDICT 7/10

A NICELY PUT-TOGETHER GAME WITH A SLIGHTLY MIXED MESSAGE.

LIKE FOOTBALL, IT'S A GAME OF TWO HALVES

Lethal VR

***Rush Of Blood* has taught us that lightgun games work amazingly well in virtual reality, and we're really hoping that more developers pick up the gauntlet thrown down by Supermassive Games.** Three Fields Entertainment is one of the first developers to take up the challenge, but its offering, *Lethal VR*, is something of a misfire.

The core idea behind this 30-stage gallery shooter is perfectly sound. Playing as a FBI recruit, you must clear five increasingly tougher simulations using a variety of different weapons, from pistols and automatics to knives and throwing stars. The featured challenges test your nerve and reflexes, requiring you to shoot a series of targets as quickly as possible, or take down armed enemies while avoiding innocent civilians. The use of VR here works well, allowing you to move around or even crouch low to take out tricky-to-hit targets; something which becomes tremendously satisfying in the later stages.

The problem with *Lethal VR* is while the numerous guns feel extremely accurate to use, the numerous knife levels feel woefully inaccurate next to them and are nowhere near as much fun to play. Luck, rather than skill takes over and as a result, you'll rarely return to them, leaving little meat on an already sparse carcass. The online leaderboards will ensure that some high score chasers will take on the challenge of topping the scoreboards, but the blandly designed stages give you little reason to revisit them to polish your skills, which is something of a pity.

Lethal VR isn't a disaster by any means, but like certain other VR games we've played, it feels more like an actual tech demo rather than a product of substance. It's certainly fun while it lasts, though.





Above: While it feels extremely cool looking down the sights of a gun, the experience is less authentic when using other weapons in the game. You want to throw this hat Oddjob style, but that technique misses more times than it hits

DETAILS

FORMAT: PSVR
OTHER FORMATS: HTC Vive
ORIGIN: United Kingdom
PUBLISHER: Team17
DEVELOPER: Three Fields Entertainment
PRICE: £11.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

AS GOOD AS

THE BROOKHAVEN EXPERIMENT





WORSE THAN

RUSH OF BLOOD

VERDICT 5/10

A BARE BONES BLASTER THAT RUNS OUT OF STEAM

Above: The brilliantly named 'Goretastic' attacks allow you to deliver one mega damaging blow to an opponent. They're all over-the-top, extremely violent and accompanied by Uncle Death popping up like the 'Toasty' man in *Mortal Kombat II*.

ELEVATOR TO HELL

Let It Die

Getting a surprise release during Sony's PlayStation Experience keynote, *Let It Die* is the latest from Grasshopper Manufacture, the studio helmed by Suda51 – one of gaming's most intriguing producers – and true to his usual form, it's bloody weird. Although he didn't direct this title himself, it has all the hallmarks of a Suda joint. Any game that has you liaising with a skateboarding, foul-mouthed Grim Reaper called 'Uncle Death' between sessions might seem extremely odd, but this is pretty much standard Suda fare. Heavy metal? Check. Wrestling moves? Of course.

Let It Die is a tough game to pin down. At its most basic level, it is a free-to-play roguelike that cribs it's best ideas from the *Souls* series and some of the interesting stuff from Ubisoft's *ZombiU*. The game takes place in 2026 when, presumably, the world has continued on its current trajectory towards total destruction and a gigantic structure, The Tower of Barbs, grows out of a rapture in Japan. Your goal, as well as everyone else who is playing the game, is to make it to the top, battling your way through the various fiends that walk its hallways. You pick an avatar from a selection of what appear to be reanimated corpses and meet with Uncle Death, who refers to you as Senpai as he guides you through the opening tutorial. Every trip up the tower begins in the Waiting Room, a fairly standard hub that serves as your place to level up, buy weapons, store items and all the things you'd expect to be able to do in a game that borrows heavily from *Dark Souls*.

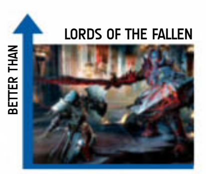
Combat also follows the *Dark Souls* blueprint, albeit an extremely simplified version – you lock on to your enemy, and dance in and out of their effective range, trying to bait out an attack that you can punish with one of your own. Stamina management is key, as too much ducking, diving and attacking will leave you in a breathless, vulnerable state that means almost certain death. *Dark Souls*' famous bonfire rest points are represented here by elevators.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS4
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: GungHo
DEVELOPER: Grasshopper Manufacture
PRICE: Free-to-play
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

BETTER THAN

LORDS OF THE FALLEN



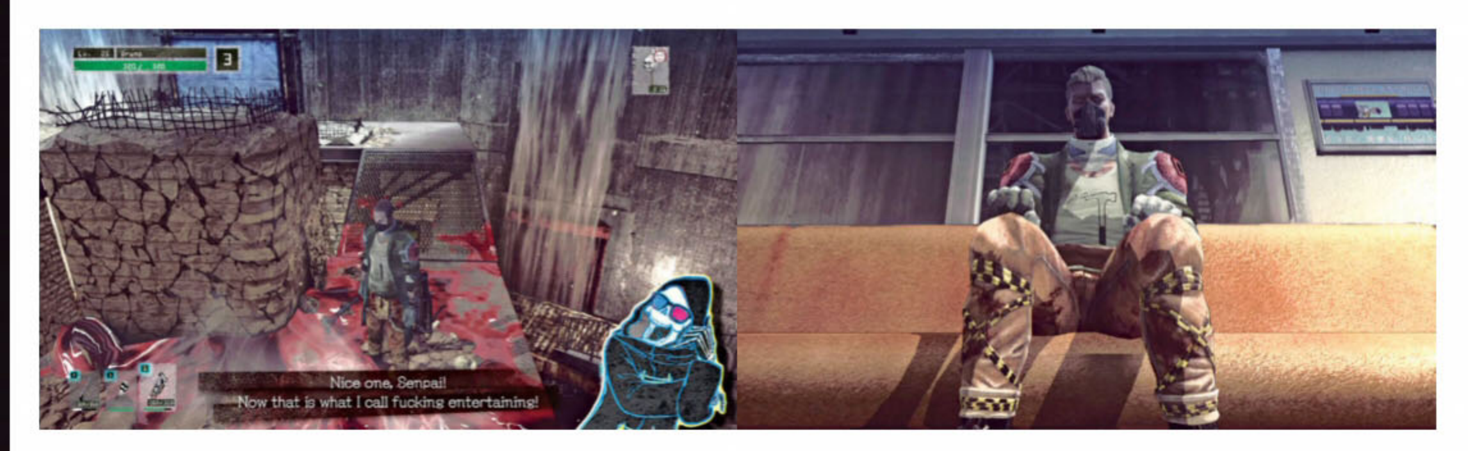


DARK SOULS III

WORSE THAN

Below: Every day you log in you get a boxed prize from Uncle Death, which can be anything from a basic weapon to get you started on that session to a rare blueprint for some monstrous killing device. Check back daily!



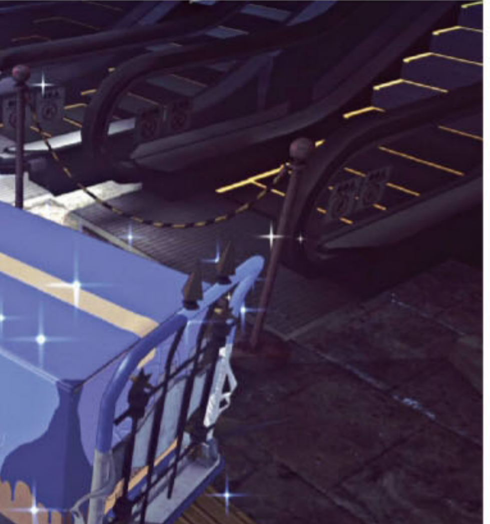


Above: *Let It Die* isn't the prettiest game around. Each level is made up of the same few corridor and room presets that are slightly randomised every time you tackle it. You soon come to learn each 'section's' secrets and enemy placement.

GIVE ME THAT DEATH METAL

There's always a feeling when it comes to free-to-play titles that they're going to slowly 'nickel and dime' you to poverty. Now, obviously the game is trying to make money, as it is entitled to do, but it is handled in a fair way. 'Death Metal' can be used to either revive you instantly upon death, be converted into gold or to buy a day/30-day pass for the elevator, allowing you to use them freely during that period instead of paying gold. In a few hours, the game has given out a fair few freebies – more than enough to get a considerable number of hours out of the game before you'd have to fork out.





Above: Chalk lines appear in the place where a would-be invader met their end in your Waiting Room.

FAQs

Q. WILL THIS RIP ME OFF?
Doesn't seem so! Most things you'd have to spend money on are fair, and the game gives you plenty.

Q. WHAT WRESTLING MOVES ARE IN?
A dropkick, a 'Torture Rack' and a hurricanrana are all doable within minutes of starting the game. A strong start.

Q. DARK SOULS? REALLY?
Yep. It's very *Dark Souls*, albeit with considerably fewer options and nowhere near as slick when it comes to the combat, but it's a similar vibe.

GRASSHOPPER MANUFACTURE DOESN'T DEAL IN BLOCKBUSTERS, BUT THIS IS LIKELY TO BE A CULT HIT

Should you find one, you can pay some of the gold you gathered to return to the Waiting Room to level up and bank all your findings, before either starting again or paying some more gold to return to where you came from.

You start off with just your fists and a pair of pants, but as you leather enemies they drop pickups that make life a bit easier. Steel pipes, hammers and even a household iron can be wielded as weapons, while armour pieces make you look like an extra from *Fury Road* dressed using only items found in a B&Q. All of these perish as you take or deal damage and cannot be repaired. Nothing is permanent and you learn to 'live off the land' a bit, constantly having to evaluate your equipment wear and tear versus the space in your inventory for loot whenever you see an enemy drop something. There are also mushrooms and small animals to find, each one of them providing a different status effect if you consume or throw them at an enemy. Switching between these requires some flicking of the PS4 touchpad, which isn't quite as precise as it needs to be, causing a few 'hilarious once but otherwise utterly infuriating' moments when instead of chucking the grenade-like Boomshroom into an angry mob, you eat it and blow up from the inside out.

WORLDWIDE

TAKING GAMING ONLINE

CHOOSE A SIDE: Once you join a team of players, you can 'go to war' against others with the winning side being the one who plundered the most gold and SPLithium from the other.

The most interesting aspect of *Let It Die* is the way that it handles multiplayer. You never fight another player directly. You can encounter them in the tower, 'Haterfied' versions of them. Much like *ZombiU*, if you die and choose to stay dead, your corpse will start to roam the level in your friend's games. If it ends up killing one of them, you get a prize. Raiding people's Waiting Rooms is far more lucrative, though. Through a terminal in your Waiting Room you can take part in the Tokyo Death Network. It allows you to enter an instance of a random player's Waiting Room and attempt to steal a small percentage of their actual gold and SPLithium – the two currencies you gain through normal play – by smashing up their banks. You can defend your own by placing your levelled up characters in defensive positions, with any potential attackers having to battle your AI-controlled team.

Thing is, there's no way to stop this. It's a constantly running thing in the background of *Let It Die* at all times. Logging on after a few days away to see that your gold and SPLithium reserves have been almost completely drained by constant raids is disheartening, as all you can really do is grind to get the numbers back up, whether that be by raiding yourself or just going headlong into the tower once again. Levelling up additional characters to defend your Waiting Room is a bit of a grind, too, as you basically have to start again – if you want a team of five, you're playing through the game five times.

Let It Die is a bit like – and this is meant as a genuine compliment – a budget PS2 curio. One of those games that is a bit rough around the edges and lacking in triple-A polish, but has an idea that is far more compelling and delivered in such a stylish way. Grasshopper Manufacture doesn't deal in blockbusters, but this is likely to be another cult hit.

VERDICT 7/10
ANOTHER WEIRD BUT COMPELLING RELEASE FROM SUDA51

ON THIN ICE

Steep

It should be the perfect time of year to have a winter extreme sports game to sink your teeth into, but *Steep*'s biggest selling point is also its biggest mistake: it's yet another open world, this one offering snowboarding, skiing, wingsuiting and paragliding.

Sports games usually pick either an arcade or simulation angle, but Ubisoft Annecy tries to straddle the line between both, and takes itself far too seriously with daft cut-scenes unveiling a newly found mountain with a voice-over that talks to you about how "epic" it is and how you must conquer it. It's daft, unnecessary, and risks obscuring the fact that *Steep* can actually feel fantastic when you're left to your own devices.

Luckily, then, after you've been walked through all of what it offers via a lengthy tutorial, you're left to explore. *Steep* is a pretty game, especially when the sun hits the right angle and the lens flare blinds you like when you're driving to work on a crisp winter morning, and despite the fact there's far too much screen furniture most of the time, the mountains and valleys themselves are a delight to explore and discover… before the awkwardness sets in and you just give up.

Imagine you're drifting gently through the snow on your skis to your waypoint. You've spotted a bit on the map that will unlock a drop zone, and you want to get close enough to whip out your binoculars and reveal it for fast travel. But you're on a downward slope, and suddenly you've missed it. Momentum gone, you can either fast travel all the way back to the top and hope you don't miss it again, or you can put your gear away and trudge (and we do mean trudge; even using the run button) uphill, in the snow, to find a vantage point to turn and get back on track. It's painful, and means that after the opening few hours you're going to exclusively use fast travel to get from course to course, and only

DETAILS

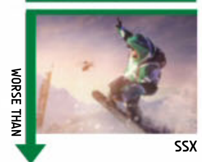
FORMAT: Xbox One
OTHER FORMATS: PS4, PC
ORIGIN: France
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Annecy
PRICE: £42.00
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 1 (2-4 online)
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

BETTER THAN

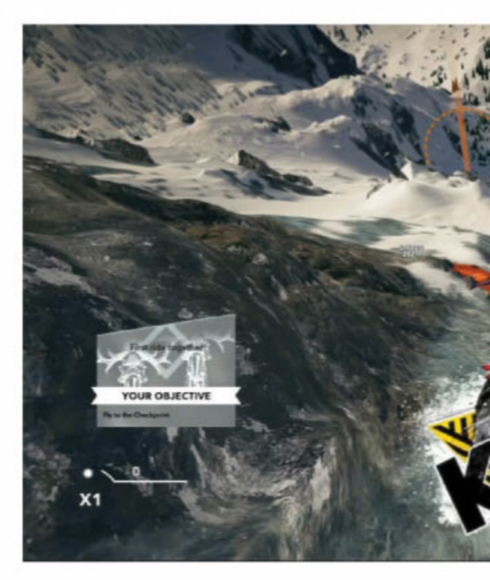


SNOW

WORSE THAN



SSX



Above: *Steep*'s controls can be a little tricky to master, but thankfully, smashing yourself to pieces is rewarded by progressing down a mastery of the art of breaking bones, and yes, even knocking yourself out.

Below: The incessant dudebro narration clashes with the spiritual respect of the mountain, as does the festival feel.

NAILING THAT RUN THROUGH A CAVERNOUS GAP IN A MOUNTAIN IS REWARDING AND VERY MOREISH, BEGGING TO BE PERFECTED



FAQs

Q. HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO BE SET FREE ON THE MOUNTAIN RANGE?
Just shy of two hours.

Q. DOES IT HAVE THAT 1080° SNOWBOARDING/SSX MAGIC?
Not really as it's a little too cluttered for that.

Q. SO A TOTAL WIPEOUT THEN?
Hardly, but for all its potential it doesn't quite stick the landing.

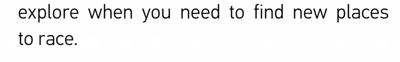
Below: The ability to watch back your last race and change cameras means you can take some gorgeous screenshots. Spin the camera round and you can get your very own hero shot that you can share.



MAPPING THE MOUNTAINS

As with many of Ubisoft's games, *Steep*'s map is scary to look at. Filled to bursting with icons and colours, it's not the easiest thing to get to grips with. The best way to get along with it is to angle it slightly and just pick a race that either you've played many times, or has "new" on it, and fast travel there.

Doing this removes many of the frustrating moments, but also removes the feeling that this is a game about exploration. Ideally, once you've finished the race, look around for a new point to discover, make your way to within 1000 feet, and then you can unlock it. It's a strange system that feels out of place in a game supposedly about freedom.



explore when you need to find new places to race.

On top of this, there's a litany of tiny issues that are infuriating. Some of the ideas are brilliant in theory, like a seven-minute long, open course that runs for miles, and encourages freedom, with no guideline to show you how to get from A to B. In practice, after six minutes you might realise you aren't going to get back up to that finish line because you took a wrong turn and you've just wasted your time. Want to pause the game mid-race? No chance. Doing so will kick you back to the starting point, so if the doorbell goes and you're expecting a parcel, you've a tricky decision to make.

Then there's the tone. A dudebro-type guy is often your point of call over the radio, but he won't shut up. There's also an attempt to create a *Forza Horizon* festival feel to the whole game, but it would have been better if you were just left to explore and race without the need for any kind of narrative.

There is a good game buried underneath all the strange decisions, though. As there are four classes of extreme sport on offer, the actual gameplay is a mixed bag. Choosing between skiing and snowboarding, for example, will pretty much come down to personal preference, as they feel very similar, offering big jumps and tricks that are easy to pull off. Paragliding is difficult to control, and rarely fun, because most of the courses have an ideal path that not only gets you to the finish quickly, but also keeps you catching air to stay high.

Wingsuiting, then, is the star of the show. The thrill of hurtling downward, skimming the snowy dust with your belly to gain more points never fades. Catching a gust of air to throw yourself higher and hit that checkpoint ring is a rush, and nailing that run through a cavernous gap in a mountain is rewarding and very moreish, begging to be perfected.

Teaming up with friends is easy, too, as you'd expect nowadays. Even if you don't have a gang of pals to play with you can just hit a button and join up with any random folk nearby. Doing so means you share your knowledge, and areas you unlock while teamed up will become available on everyone's map.

But as *Steep* gives, it also takes away, and there are areas gated off until you reach a particular level. Sure, completing races, scoring big, or even just smashing your bones to pieces (there is a progression system for each type of activity: exploration, bone breaking, etc) will see you level up at a decent pace. But the idea of a narrator telling you that it's your world to explore and then blocking you from places until you reach an arbitrary level makes for a game that is, ultimately, at odds with itself. Plus unlocking clothes for your avatar hasn't been fun in years.

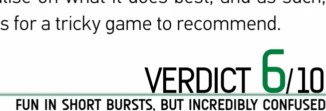
Steep isn't without moments of joy. Watching back your best bits and taking pictures as you're upside down mid-jump is pure elation in gaming form. But then there will be a course that feels as though it was intended to make you angry by placing too many obstacles in the way of a downhill slalom.

It could have been something special, and there's tremendous potential for a sequel, but for now, *Steep* feels like a game of two halves. It tries to do too much and fails to capitalise on what it does best, and as such, makes for a tricky game to recommend.

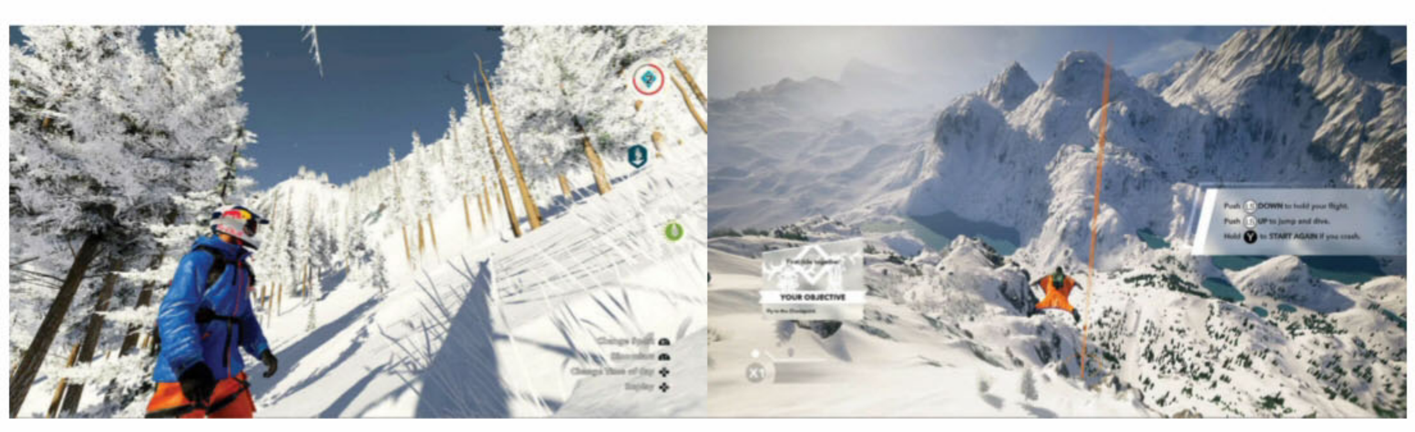
MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

LESS IS MORE: Creation tools to make your own course, an online presence: these are all things included that would work better in a more coherent game. *Steep* is at its best when you're just racing, and everything else feels like filler.



FUN IN SHORT BURSTS, BUT INCREDIBLY CONFUSED





WORLD OF FINAL FANTASY

BETTER THAN





WORSE THAN

LEGEND OF HEROES: TRAILS OF COLD STEEL II

Below: Exploring dungeons and finding loot is one of the ways the game stays fresh



SLIME FOR ANOTHER ADVENTURE!

Dragon Quest VIII: Journey Of The Cursed King

The 3DS is no stranger to large JRPG releases, with *Shin Megami Tensei IV: Apocalypse* and *Pokemon Sun And Moon* releasing in 2016, but there's still room for another gigantic journey, and *Dragon Quest VIII: Journey Of The Cursed King* fills that niche excellently.

Dragon Quest VIII kicks off with an evil mage named Dhoulmagus turning innocent people into different creatures and animals, and it's up to you and your party to find a way to stop this curse, as well as Dhoulmagus.

Accompanied by *Dragon Quest's* lighthearted tone, it's not a hugely mature story. Instead, the game captures the tone of going on an adventure with your friends, all the while chasing down an evil wizard who sometimes has a tendency for equine transformation.

The game flouts the traditional moody JRPG protagonist and world-bending plot to make something a little bit more grounded that still has a whole lot of heart behind it. Your friends and party members are *Dragon Quest VIII's* lifeblood, with the skits and interactions between them becoming the real core of the game. As you begin to bond with your party-members and interact with NPCs, the story takes a backseat in favour of the incredibly cohesive world.

As you explore the world, you'll run into random battles. However, these come at a steady pace and are not so frequent that it becomes a chore. Expect a relatively simple battle system, with normal attacks bolstered by elemental spells in addition to healing and buffs. While serviceable, there's not much variation or difficulty in the combat, nor does *Dragon Quest VIII* ever really expand on the basics. With a simple upgrade path for your party as you level up, the game never mechanically expands to something more compelling.

However, where *Dragon Quest VIII* shines is in the little details. From the bizarre monster designs like giant humanoid chickens to the exaggerated accents of your party members, *Dragon Quest VIII's* world is brimming with personality, with the lighthearted tone, monsters and party members making for a memorable journey.

Dragon Quest VIII is a pretty lengthy game, with the total playtime for the main story racking up to around 40 hours. However, despite the somewhat basic battle system, the game keeps itself fresh by letting us explore dungeons, grab loot and givingour characters costumes, it never feels like it's been padded out like so many other JRPGs.

Dragon Quest VIII is just a joy to be in, with the world being the main reason you come, evil wizards and looming destruction be damned.

DETAILS

FORMAT: 3DS
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Level-5
PRICE: £28.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A



Below: A new camera in the 3DS version of the game makes it easy to share photos



ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

A NEW LICK OF PAINT: The improved graphics work brilliantly on the 3DS, with the cel-shaded style of Akira Toriyama fitting in perfectly with the world



VERDICT 7/10

THE PERSONALITY MAKES IT A JOY TO EXPLORE





Above: Clementine returns in *ANF*, but is that such a good thing? Perhaps this season would have been better as a standalone, because there's no way a new protagonist could ever compare to how much time we've spent getting to know Clem.

OLD GROUND FOR TELLTALE

The Walking Dead: A New Frontier Season 3 Episode 1 & 2

***A New Frontier* begins with its graphics settings turned up to max.** It is nearly unplayable. Telltale's optimism here is admirable, but misplaced: their newest addition to the steadily growing *Walking Dead* series suffers from the same issues that every Telltale game has. Input lag makes quick time events almost impossible; scenes freeze at points that are supposed to be tense, but instead end up being comedically awkward. Turning the settings and the resolution down makes the game run – not perfectly, not anywhere near perfectly – but the characters end up looking like badly-made sex dolls, all smooth skin and dead eyes, with an occasional twitch of the eyebrow or a wry smirk as their only facial expression.

At this point, too, it feels like the studio has hit on an easy formula, and it's not willing to break out of it. The story limps, slowly, for the first episode, with a dramatic twist right at the end, then picks up pace in the second episode, with a dramatic twist right at the end. The twists, as always, are good, and genuinely unexpected. But the pacing throughout the rest of the episode is not, and it feels like the interactive parts are growing less and less interesting with every Telltale game released. The plot pauses for a few minutes now and again to allow you to explore junkyards and petrol stations, just to find the one sequence of object-fetching that drives the plot onwards. It's just not that fun, and even when the game hands you an important choice, it just doesn't seem to have a great deal of effect on how people think of you, or what happens next.

There is still promise for the series, though its characters seem more one-dimensional than Lee and Clementine (an older version of the latter is a character in this season, too). The New Frontier are interesting, if confusingly motivated antagonists, and the flashbacks in each episode to the previous lives of main character Javier and companion Clementine allow for revelations that keep the story moving in its slower moments.

It's hard to tell if *A New Frontier* seems lacking because of general Telltale fatigue or if it's just a bit of a slow start, but the difference between the quite boring *Episode One* and the more action-filled *Episode Two* implies that it'll only get better from here. It's worth noting that *A New Frontier* seems less concerned with zombies than Seasons One and Two – they seem more like nuisances, like narrative roadbumps, as the story focuses more on human enemies and the relationships between family, friends and foes. If it can keep telling interesting stories, perhaps it's worth looking past the usual Telltale problems.

MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

TIME FOR A NEW FACE: Protagonist Javier really isn't all that interesting. We'd rather have played as his sister-in-law, Kate, having to take care of her two teenage stepchildren during a zombie apocalypse.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
OTHER FORMATS: PS4, Xbox One, Android
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Telltale
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £18.99
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 1
MINIMUM SPEC: Windows 7 or higher, Intel Core 2 Duo 2.4GHz, 3 GB RAM, 8 GB hard drive space, Nvidia GTS 450+ with 1024MB+ VRAM
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

BETTER THAN — TELLTALE'S GAME OF THRONES





WORSE THAN — THE WALKING DEAD SEASON ONE

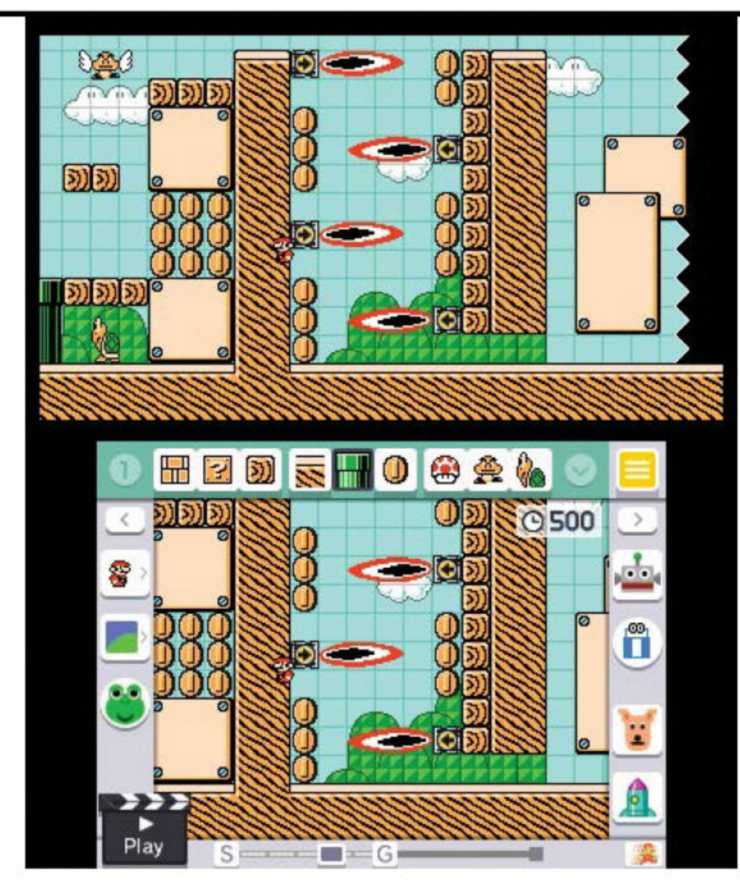


VERDICT 5/10
A PLOT SLOWER THAN A WALKER.

Below: You thought zombies were your worst nightmare – but that's before the *New Frontier* turned up. They're something in between a cult, a bunch of angry biker-type dudes and men who just really, really like shooting things with the flimsiest excuse



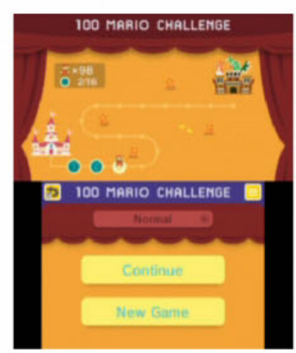




Left: The creative tools at your disposal are very impressive with pretty much every enemy type and level feature you could ask for. Plus all four Super Mario themes are included, just like the Wii U version. Below: Nintendo has created a bunch of new levels for its Super Mario Challenge mode, all of which you can go into and edit yourself either to learn about their construction or make something completely new from them.







SOME MISSING PARTS

Super Mario Maker

This conversion of *Super Mario Maker* from Wii U to 3DS comes with its plusses and minuses. On the positive side of things, it's more or less the same fantastic platforming experience with a massive suite of creative tools that puts the power of Mario design in your hands. On the negative side, it's not as content complete as the original game and it lacks a pretty significant piece of functionality: the ability to share levels online.

Now, that last bit seems like a big deal. You can share locally with Street Pass, but you're unable to upload your levels for others to easily find using a Course ID. You can't tag levels based on content or theme so others can get at them. And by extension you can't go looking for them either. That's a shame, but it's not game-breaking. We say that because while the ability to share such content would be fantastic (as it was on Wii U), it is only a portion of what makes *Super Mario Maker* enjoyable.

Almost by way of compensation, you get the chance to take on the Super Mario Challenge mode, featuring 18 worlds, each with between four and eight stages, created by Nintendo developers and each with their own ingenious little twist. Some of the level design in these stages is really fantastic, teaching you about the toolset while also telling little stories and playing with the format. You can really see how *Mario Maker* has inspired this development team just as much as it has those who play it. What's more, all of these stages offer medals to unlock based on specific objectives (one of which is hidden until you complete the first) and all of them can be edited by you so you can see how it was put together in-game.

Which brings us to the creation suite, which is once again robust, although not quite as expansive as the Wii U version. Big Mushrooms that supersize Mario into a level-destroying monster are gone as are, more disappointingly, Mystery Mushrooms that allowed you to use amiibo to turn Mario into other characters. This was one of the original game's more fun features, giving some great value to amiibo collectors and sparking all sorts of fun levels inspired by the toys we had on our shelves. It also means that while Wii U-created levels are made available on 3DS through the Mario 100 and Recommended Levels tabs of the game, any with the Big Mushroom or Mystery Mushroom in them are not compatible.

The final package then is mixed, but the bottom line has to be that *Super Mario Maker* is still an insanely fun game. It's one of the best 2D *Mario* experiences out there and plays great on 3DS. It's not as complete as we might have liked, but it's certainly not bad.

DETAILS

FORMAT: 3DS
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo Software Technology
DEVELOPER: Nintendo Entertainment Analysis & Development
PRICE: £34.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

BETTER THAN
CHIBI-ROBO! ZIP LASH



WORSE THAN
SUPER MARIO MAKER WII U

MISSING LINK
WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

SHARING IS CARING: The relative lack of sharing options on the 3DS version of *Mario Maker* is a significant loss for the game, limiting your access to created content, the lifeblood of the experience.

VERDICT 8/10
MISSING FEATURES, BUT NOT MISSING CLASS

DETAILS

FORMAT: PSVR
OTHER FORMATS: PC
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Adult Swim Games
DEVELOPER: Fire Face Corporation
PRICE: £10.49
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

BETTER THAN

RIVEN: THE SEQUEL TO MYST





THE WITNESS

WORSE THAN

A PUZZLING VR CONVERSION

Small Radios Big Televisions

Owen Deery might not be on your gaming radar, but his cleverly crafted puzzle game means his is a name that's worth looking out for in the future. Although *Small Radios Big Televisions* features VR headsets during play it's not a true VR game. It's also an incredibly short experience, but no less compelling while it lasts.

Spread across five relatively short levels – the whole game should take no more than three hours to complete – *Small Radios Big Televisions* requires you to search abandoned buildings that are set up in a hauntingly empty 2.5D world. Frustratingly, there's no real benefit from wearing your VR headset, but it does make the experience feel weirdly immersive and closed off, particularly once you find the old cassette tapes which are carefully hidden in each building.

Loading up a tape instantly transports you to a weird warped world, which houses a green gem that must be collected to unlock certain doors found elsewhere in the decaying constructions you're visiting. Initially you'll find them with ease, but as the game progresses you realise that you need to magnetise the tapes (which distorts the world even further) or activate them in certain areas in order to find those elusive gems. Solving puzzles also grants small crumbs of narrative, which are further expanded by the radio conversations that appear between levels. Lenses are hidden away in stages, which add further story rewards upon finding them all.

While traversing through doors can be occasionally tricky (you effectively use a reticule to navigate rooms, open doors and pick up and manipulate items), it's never to the game's detriment. The simplistic nature of the puzzles won't placate everyone, but like Jonathan Blow's *The Witness*, Deery has created worlds that beg to be explored. An intriguing game that's short, but also sweet.



POINTLESS IN VR, BUT STILL A COMPELLING PUZZLER



Above: Many of the 15 tapes can be magnetised two to three times, for an impressive number of 3D worlds to explore.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PSVR
OTHER FORMATS: PC
ORIGIN: United Kingdom
PUBLISHER: Penny Black Studios
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £15.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

BETTER THAN

DREAMFLIGHT VR



EAGLE FLIGHT

WORSE THAN

PAPER THIN

How We Soar

Early VR games have had a relatively easy ride thanks to the sheer wonderment that virtual reality offers when you've never encountered it before. Even the most mundane and average game can become instantly more thrilling, somehow more compelling, because they look and feel so different to what you're typically used to. As more and more games begin to arrive that need to choose gameplay over quick thrills is becoming more and more important, and sadly, for *How We Soar*, VR can't hide the clunky experience on offer.

First the good news though, *How We Soar* has one of the most compelling stories we've encountered in the new medium. It also looks stunning, with the papercraft world changing and warping as your gorgeous looking Phoenix flies through it. The gameplay, like *Eagle Flight*'s is simplistic, but still enjoyable, typically focusing on you flying through hoops to unfold new parts of the world. Different coloured orbs also appear and once all have been collected, will transform into a rival bird that must be chased and caught. Once captured it's used to exit the stage and trigger the next chapter of the story, which focuses on an author struggling to balance his work and personal life.

It's a pity then that Ubisoft's recently released *Eagle Flight* exposes just how dull *How We Soar*'s gameplay actually is. Its stodgy controls and slowly turning bird feel archaic after experiencing the thrilling movement in Ubisoft's game. Yes it could be argued that the slower pace is deliberately designed to let you fully explore the open world, but the irksome controls can make it hard to react to incoming objects; while chasing after those escaped birds becomes an exercise in frustration. As a result it's simply not fun to play.

It's easy to get caught up in *How We Soar*'s 'oh so pretty' stylistic setting, but when you peel that delightful paper world away you discover its gameplay is as thin as the material holding its world together.

VERDICT 5/10

A CLEVER STORY MARRIED TO DULL GAMEPLAY



"Persona 4 is actually one of the reasons that I'm in the industry"

TOMASZ PRUSKI, SENIOR LEVEL DESIGNER, CI GAMES

WHY I ❤...

PERSONA 4

TOMASZ PRUSKI, SENIOR LEVEL DESIGNER, CI GAMES

"Persona 4 *is actually one of the reasons that I'm in the industry. In a good and bad way, because when I first started playing* Persona 4 *I played for three weeks straight. I didn't go to school, I missed all of my classes, so when I came back there was too much backlog. I was doing two majors so I dropped one and focused on the one that was more game-design related. So, I focused on games and now I'm here. That's why* Persona *is a very personal game for me and I'm really looking forward to* Persona 5."



RETRO

NO.183

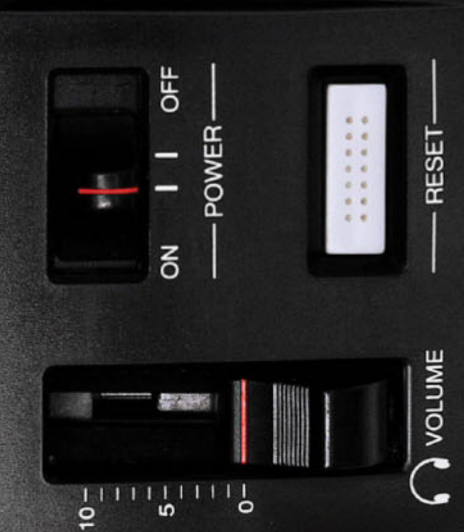


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THE RETRO GUIDE TO... MEGA DRIVE

We reveal the greatest games to be released on Sega's exciting 16-bit home console



THE MEGA DRIVE faced a huge challenge when it was first launched in October 1988. While its two launch games, *Space Harrier II* and *Super Thunder Blade,* were clearly superior looking to the 8-bit titles that were available at the time, it was overshadowed by the release of *Super Mario Bros 3,* which had been released the previous week. It wasn't just Nintendo making things difficult for Sega, NEC's PC Engine was also doing great business in Japan (Sega's machine would eventually finish third behind both NEC's console and the SNES).

Sega's early games were typically ports of its popular arcade games, but as interest in the console grew, more and more original titles started appearing on the machine. While Sega continued to struggle in Japan, it was making good inroads in the West, particularly in the USA where titles like *Sonic* and a host of fantastic sports games from Electronic Arts began to give Sega's console a 'cool' image that Nintendo's systems were clearly lacking. Indeed, at one point Sega actually wrestled market share away from Nintendo, although it didn't hold the position for long. The Mega Drive eventually ended up selling over 30 million units, a massive achievement when you consider sales for the Master System, its 8-bit predecessor, managed around 13 million (not including its huge success in Brazil). It wasn't enough to topple the SNES though, which eventually sold just over 49 million units.

Despite its loss to Nintendo, the Mega Drive remains a truly excellent console with a huge number of important games. Here's a selection of some of its greatest releases. How many do you remember?





GHOULS 'N GHOSTS 1989

SEGA

Sega's port of Capcom's popular arcade game proved that the 16-bit console was more than capable of replicating an authentic arcade experience. It featured all the levels, all the bosses and the same finely honed gameplay that made Capcom's original arcade game so much fun to play. Want an interesting fact? How about that the lead programmer was none other than *Sonic*'s Yuji Naka?

THE REVENGE OF SHINOBI 1989

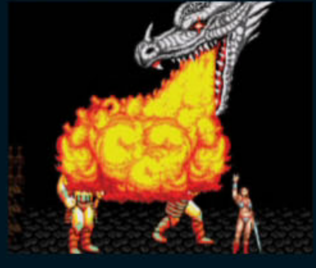
SEGA AM7

Sega went all out on its home console follow-up to its smash arcade hit. It's a slightly slower-paced game than its arcade predecessor, but no less important thanks to some sensational-looking visuals, an amazingly atmospheric soundtrack by Yuzo Koshiro and a ridiculous array of bosses that range from Godzilla to Spider-Man, Batman and the Terminator. Needless to say, numerous licence issues surrounding the iconic character meant that many of them were dropped or changed in later revisions that Sega released.









GOLDEN AXE 1989

SEGA AM7

Sega's classic brawler was converted to the Mega Drive the same year it stormed arcades. It's an incredibly accurate port, with all the levels, characters and over-the-top magic effects that featured in the original. In fact, it actually went one better by including an entire additional level that considerably ups the difficulty when you've defeated the mighty Death Adder.

HERZOG ZWEI 1989

TECHNOSOFT

This utterly absorbing game is one of the earliest examples from the RTS genre and placed you in control of a cool transforming mech. Mechs were used to not only purchase new combat units, but also issue them with commands and shoot down incoming enemies. It played at a far slower pace compared to later examples of the fledgling genre, but was no less enjoyable because of it.





ZOOM 1989

DISCOVERY SOFTWARE

There are few original puzzle games on the Mega Drive, but this interesting take on Amidar is notable. The aim was to guide your cute creature along the lines of each puzzle grid, filling in titles as you completed them. It also featured a fun two-player option.

SWORD OF VERMILLION 1989

SEGA AM2

The Mega Drive trailed massively behind the SNES when it came to quality RPGs, but it still had an impressive (if rather small) selection of titles. This early effort is unusual as it offered four distinct viewpoints, depending on whether you were in a town, exploring a dungeon, taking part in battle or combating a boss. It's notable for being far more Western inspired than other Mega Drive releases.





TRIP TALKINS

Trip Hawkins on the success of the Mega Drive

Many people feel that EA was instrumental in the Mega Drive's Western success. Is this something you'd agree with?
There's no question about it, considering that EA had about 50 per cent of the software business for the Mega Drive and expanded the market with EA Sports, *Populous* and *Road Rash*.

What was your relationship with Sega like?
To this day, there is a high degree of mutual respect and class in my relationships with David Rosen, the founder of Sega, Nakayama, who acquired and modernised Sega in the digital era, and Tom Kalinske, who was president of Sega of America during the heyday. That said, we did go toe-to-toe when we negotiated deals, and it was no holds barred. In hindsight, I imagine for all of us that we consider each other among the more entertaining characters we have had the opportunity to do business with in our lives.

What were those little yellow tabs for on EA carts?
It was just for a bit of colour and visual interest and it probably kept the cartridge from cracking open. It's great that you remember something that silly.

Many EA games were far better on the Mega Drive than they were on the SNES, why was this?
It's pretty simple really. If you only wanted to do a paintbox program or a beautiful landscape for Mario that scrolled slowly, the SNES was great. But for conventional games with conventional animation needs, the Mega Drive was the clear winner.

Which EA Mega Drive game do you feel best took advantage of the machine and why?
It's hard to argue with *Madden Football*, *Populous*, or *Road Rash*. I also loved *PGA Tour Golf*.

What's the best non-Electronic Arts Mega Drive game you've ever played and why?



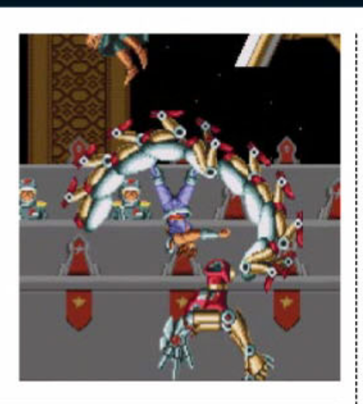
My personal favourite would probably be *Rampart*, and I also really liked *ToeJam & Earl*. The most successful non-EA game would of course be *Sonic*, but that's not my favourite genre.

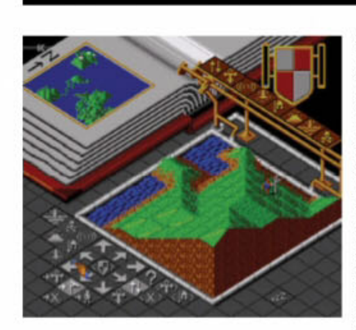
Why do you think the machine remains so popular with gamers?
Plug and play, two players head-to-head, graphics that are good enough, your favourite sports. What's not to like?

STRIDER 1989

SEGA

This was another Capcom classic that was converted in-house by Sega. While not quite as arcade perfect as many claimed at the time, it was still exceptionally accurate, featuring all the levels, music and bosses of the arcade original. It's notable for being one of the first Mega Drive games to arrive on an 8-Megabit cartridge, while the instruction manual expands on the original arcade story.





POPULOUS 1989

BULLFROG

It's claimed that *Populous* was the first Mega Drive game Electronic Arts published on the 16-bit console. What we know for sure is that it was an incredibly faithful adaptation of Peter Molyneux's classic god sim, with a clever icon system that could be easily navigated without a mouse. A sequel followed four years later, but we prefer the original.

M.U.S.H.A. 1990

COMPILE

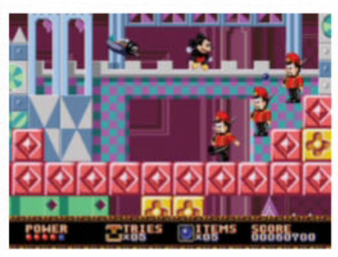
Annoyingly, this incredible shmup was never released in Europe, meaning its US and Japanese variants are rapidly rising in price. Part of Compile's Aleste series, *M.U.S.H.A.* saw you controlling a large flying mech and wreaking havoc with an impressive range of over-the-top weaponry that can be steadily upgraded. In addition to its neat power-ups, *Gradius*-like drones could be picked up, which could be set to six different attack modes.

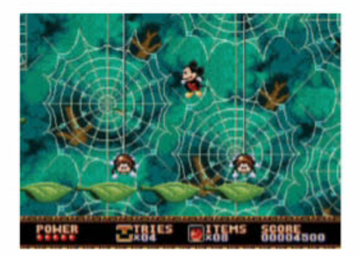


CASTLE OF ILLUSION STARRING MICKEY MOUSE 1990

SEGA AM7

Famed at the time for its cartoon aesthetics and delightful soundtrack, Mickey's first Mega Drive adventure was widely considered to be one of the best platformers on the system (at least until a certain hedgehog came along). It was full of imaginatively designed levels and led to a number of other Disney licences being adapted to the system.





MICKEY'S FIRST MEGA DRIVE ADVENTURE WAS WIDELY CONSIDERED TO BE ONE OF THE BEST PLATFORMERS ON THE SYSTEM

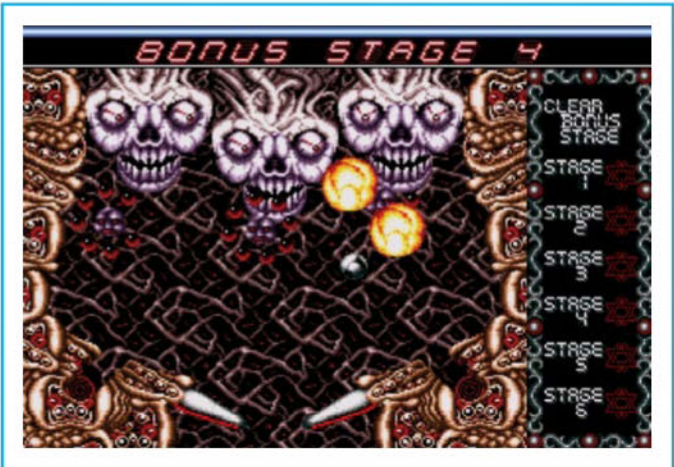




THUNDER FORCE III 1990

TECHNOSOFT

Technosoft's second *Thunder Force* game to hit the Mega Drive was a belter. It featured sensational visuals (many of which could be tackled in any order) a brilliant weapon system that could be cycled through at will and some truly sensational music. Many prefer the visually more impressive *Thunder Force IV*, but we're bigger fans of this one.



DEVIL CRASH 1991

TECHNOSOFT

Known as *Dragon's Fury* in Europe, this excellent adaptation of the PC Engine classic featured satanic themes (which were toned down for its Western release) and a three-tiered core table, as well as additional bonus ones where you were set various tasks. It also featured a truly excellent soundtrack, which carried on seemingly forever before it looped.

TOEJAM & EARL 1991

JOHNSON VOORSANGER PRODUCTIONS

This delightful oddity was rife with Nineties culture and revolved around two bizarre aliens who had crash landed on Earth and needed to find the pieces of their missing ship. Each randomly generated level has a host of goodies to pick up and all manner of weird enemies to avoid, while player's can restore health by high-fiving each other. Silly, silly fun.








SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 1991

SONIC TEAM

Sega's perennial mascot needs no introduction. Created as a direct competitor to Nintendo's Mario, Sonic was largely responsible for helping generate the Mega Drive's cooler, edgier image that briefly ensured it was the number one games console. Created by Yuji Naka, *Sonic* received rave reviews at the time of release thanks to its sensational-looking visuals, smart level design and sheer speed. It was eventually packed alongside the console in the USA (replacing *Altered Beast*) and was followed by numerous sequels and spin-offs. He's now as iconic as Mario.

STREETS OF RAGE 2 1992

SEGA AM7

While *Streets Of Rage* was a worthy contender to *Final Fight*, it was Sega's remarkable sequel that truly stole the crown from the SNES for 'console with the best scrolling fighter'. Graphically it was massively enhanced with big, chunky sprites, excellent animation and some truly stunning locations. All four characters played vastly differently to each other, while the lame police car special moves from the original had been replaced with far better alternatives. It also featured another killer soundtrack from Yuzo Koshiro.





DESERT STRIKE: RETURN TO THE GULF 1992

ELECTRONIC ARTS



Lead designer Mike Posehn had no videogame experience before starting *Desert Strike*, but you'd never realise that upon playing it. Effectively the thinking man's shoot-'em-up, *Desert Strike*'s varied missions saw your Apache helicopter moving deep into enemy territory and taking out strategically placed emplacements while looking for missing soldiers. Several sequels followed.

ECCO THE DOLPHIN 1992

NOVATRADE INTERNATIONAL

It's a little too difficult at times, but this delightful left-field effort from Ed Annunziata proved that there was more to the Mega Drive than just arcade experiences. Gameplay is predominantly exploration and puzzle-based, with your charming dolphin scouring the seas around Atlantis, while remembering to replenish his air and eat fish in order to keep his health high. Odd, but utterly compelling.

GLEY LANCER 1992

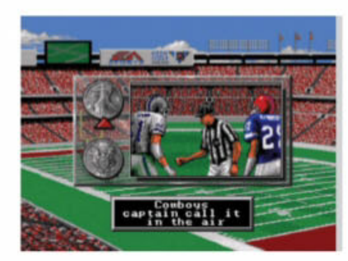
MASAYA

The best thing about *Gley Lancer* is its novel 'Gunners' mechanic, which allows you to mount the powerful weapons in seven different positions. There was more to Gley Lancer than slick gameplay mechanics, however, and its challenging bosses, incredible-looking visuals and great music now ensure that it commands a ridiculously high price online, leading many to go with the far cheaper Virtual Console version.







MADDEN NFL '94 1993

HIGH SCORE PRODUCTIONS

The fourth Mega Drive *Madden* game is widely considered the best as it refined the game in a number of ways. It was the first to have the official NFL licence, introduced several important play options, including 'Pass-Catch Mode' and 'Bluff Play', and let gamers play a full season via a useful password system.

PHANTASY STAR IV: THE END OF THE MILLENNIUM 1993

SEGA

Although its translation wasn't the best, Sega's third and final *Phantasy Star* game on the Mega Drive was definitely a highlight for the series. It's $100 asking price was something of a stumbling block, but those that bit found a masterfully crafted RPG with interesting characters, a robust yet elegant magic system and plenty of interesting locations to explore.







SHINOBI III: RETURN OF THE NINJA MASTER 1993

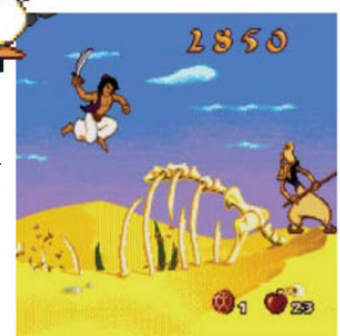
MEGASOFT

This remarkable sequel returned to the fast-paced action of the original arcade game and was all the better for it. The bosses throughout were absolutely insane, several levels saw Joe using horses and surfboards to great effect, and he could also cling to walls and utilise a devastating dashkick. First reviewed in 1992, Sega made several cuts to the game, which can now be found online if you know where to look.

ALADDIN 1993

VIRGIN GAMES USA

Overseen by David Perry, *Aladdin* was a huge success on Sega's console, ending up being the third best-selling game with 4 million units sold. Famed for its lavish animation (which was created by Disney animators) and remarkable soundtrack, it was a slick platformer that played as good as it looked. Interestingly, the various Nintendo versions were completely different as they were created by Capcom.



A LOOK BACK AT ALADDIN

David Perry on his Disney collaboration

How did you come to work on *Aladdin*?

Our team made *Global Gladiators* for McDonald's on Mega Drive, it was published by Virgin and then Sega gave it a Game Of The Year award. Sega then wanted us to make and co-publish *Cool Spot*, a game for 7-Up. Sega liked that as well, so they offered our team Disney's *Aladdin*. It was under development elsewhere but Disney wasn't liking the progress. I have to say, I felt really lucky to be at Virgin, it was definitely the right place at the right time.

The animation throughout is outstanding, did you receive help from Disney at all?

We had an incredible internal animation team lead by Mike Dietz, however, Jeffrey Katzenberg asked what Disney could do to help; the answer was, 'Can Disney Feature Animation in Florida work under Mike's leadership on the game?' Only Katzenberg could make that happen. The quality of the animation was incredible and every animation frame they made had to be treated with incredible respect as it was so valuable.

What was the biggest problem you faced?

How the heck do we get all that incredible Disney animation into a Sega Genesis? We came up with a very custom compression system and added another team member (Andy Astor), he did an incredible job of finding clever ways to crowbar more frames in.



How did you decide what parts of the movie would make good levels?

David Bishop worked on the original design and filtered the script down into the select, key levels. We had a nice blend of gameplay for a side-scroller. I like it when you can't predict what's coming next.

Where did the idea for the Abu mini-game originate from?

We were inspired by all kinds of past experiences, a good example was the little Nintendo *Game & Watch* games.

What do you feel is the best level?

I liked the desert level as our level designer Bill put a lot of effort into hiding secrets. I also loved seeing kids' reactions when the camels in the game would spit.

The music is extremely accurate, how did you accomplish this?

Tommy Tallarico was incredibly passionate about raising the bar on videogame music. He worked with Disney to ensure the music was as authentic as possible.



DOCTOR ROBOTNIK'S MEAN BEAN MACHINE 1993

COMPILE

This was not only a Robotnik-themed skin for *Puyo Puyo*, but the first time the popular Japanese puzzle game ever appeared in the west. Compile's game is incredibly fun, requiring you to rotate and match beans of the same colour in order to beat your opponent. It really came alive with a second player and was incredibly competitive.



ROAD RASH II 1993

ELECTRONIC ARTS

This excellent sequel improved on the original by adding a devastating chain and the ability to use nitrous oxide, which increased the top speed of the player's bike for a short amount of time. Different weapons would now do a set amount of damage, while the well-designed tracks now required you to place in the first three positions to continue.

NHL '94 1993

ELECTRONIC ARTS

Like *Madden '94*, EA's hockey series also had a notable upgrade in 1993. It added the 'one timer' hockey move, featured four distinct game modes – Regular Season, Shootout, Playoffs and Best Of Seven Playoffs – and included team-specific organ songs. It otherwise tightened the already great gameplay, while a later Mega-CD upgrade featured real-life NHL footage.



SHINING FORCE II 1993

SONIC SOFTWARE PLANNING

Everything was improved for this stunning SRPG sequel. Battles were better balanced and amazingly animated; the game world was far larger than the original, there were even more classes to recruit, while menus were far easier to navigate.





GUNSTAR HEROES 1993

TREASURE

Treasure's excellent debut remains the best run-and-gun on the system. Famed for its novel weapon system and inventive level design, Treasure's graphically amazing game constantly threw curveballs as you cart-wheeled from one imaginative boss fight to the next. Amazingly, it was rejected by 12 producers at Sega before it was finally given the green light.



SPLATTERHOUSE III 1993

NOW PRODUCTION

This Mega Drive exclusive is notable for deviating from the standard scrolling stages in favour of non-linear exploration. It introduced a Power Meter that could be filled by collecting Eldritch Orbs and transformed Rick into a more powerful monster, while multiple endings ensured plenty of replay value. It appeared as an unlockable extra in Namco's 2010 reboot.





ROCKET KNIGHT ADVENTURES 1993

KONAMI

Although it had initially focused on the SNES, Konami did start releasing great games for the Mega Drive. *Rocket Knight* was a superb example, featuring giant, brilliantly animated sprites, a novel charge system to power protagonist Sparkster around the levels and plenty of gameplay variety. A sequel, *Sparkster: Rocket Knight Adventures 2*, appeared the following year.



PGA TOUR GOLF III 1993

HITMEN PRODUCTIONS

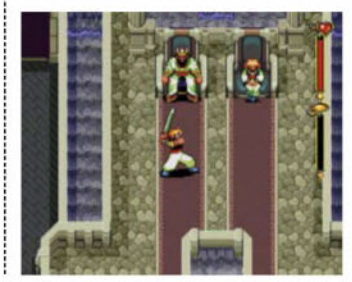
This Mega Drive exclusive is widely considered to be the best golf game on the system. It refined and enhanced the golf swing mechanics, added a 'Ball Lie' window and featured 11 professional golfers. There were also eight different courses to choose from (the most available in the series at that point in time).

STORY OF THOR 1994



ANCIENT

This was Sega's answer to *Zelda*, and proved that the Mega Drive was more than capable of emulating the SNES's best games. It's mainly notable for the four unique elemental spirits that benefit the player in combat and while traversing the game world.





CONTRA: HARD CORPS 1994

KONAMI



While Konami lost several notable employees to start-up Treasure, *Hard Corps* proved it still had plenty of talent left. While it clearly suffered from only having three fire buttons, *Hard Corps* remained an incredible run-and-gun that featured astonishing sprite work, gigantic and inventive bosses, a pulsing soundtrack and a useful new slide attack. The four available characters each featured their own skills and weapon load-outs, while the focus on story was quite refreshing for the series.

TOP GEAR 2 1994

GREMLIN INTERACTIVE



It's bizarre that no other *Top Gears* made it to the Mega Drive, as the one that did was superb. Styled on *Lotus Challenge*, it featured an excellent multiplayer mode, a gut-wrenching sensation of speed and 64 courses spread across 16 countries. Frustratingly, it was only released in the US so few gamers got to experience it.

PETE SAMPRAS TENNIS 1994

ZEPPELIN GAMES

Highly regarded on its original release, this thoroughly entertaining tennis game still holds up well today. The controls were tight and responsive, allowing for a large number of moves, while the AI players were challenging but never unfair. In addition to its three game modes, there are two secret ones, one of which has a cameo by Dizzy.





EARTHWORM JIM 1994

SHINY ENTERTAINMENT

Shiny Entertainment's calling card remains an essential Mega Drive buy. Using a huge 24-MEG cartridge to house all its sumptuous animation, *Earthworm Jim* was an utterly bizarre game that was filled with irreverent humour and quirky gameplay mechanics. Doug TenNapel's creation would go on to star in sequels, as well as his own comic and cartoon series.



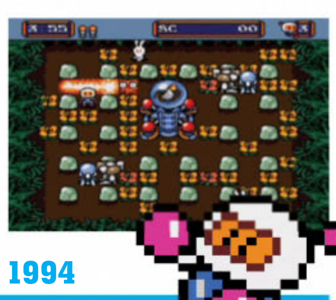


MORTAL KOMBAT II 1994

PROBE ENTERTAINMENT

Probe's sequel was an excellent translation of the popular arcade game that actually played faster than the arcade original as well as featuring some exclusive hidden Easter Eggs. It was designed around the six-button controller and featured all the original blood, fatalities and characters from the first, as well as the friendships and babalities.





MEGA BOMBERMAN 1994

HUDSON SOFT

This is actually a conversion of *Bomberman '94*, which was released on the PC Engine the previous year. It featured the kangaroo-like Louies, which had unique abilities, as well as a remixed soundtrack. Unlike the PC Engine version, Mega Bomberman's multiplayer supported four and not five players.

YUJI NAKA TALKS SONIC

The veteran coder revisits his classic game

Is it true that playing *Super Mario Bros* inspired you to create Sonic?
Every time I played the first stage I wondered why I couldn't clear it faster, the better I got at playing it. This feeling must have been the beginning of the idea of *Sonic*, as when you get good at playing, you can run through the stage really fast. I think *Sonic* itself turned out to be a totally different concept to *Super Mario Bros*. But I do feel it was a game that affected me very positively. There is a part in *Sonic 1* where Sonic swims in the water and eats bubbles to breathe. I was very happy when *Super Mario Bros* later used a similar system in one its sequels, because I felt we were inspiring each other.

What inspired Green Hill Zone?
Green Hill Zone was inspired by California. Also we were aiming to show the latest computer graphics at that time, which were using polygon and ray tracing through pixel art to make it look very new.

Did you drop any features from *Sonic The Hedgehog*?
There were two features that we were not able to put into *Sonic 1*. The first one was to support two players playing at the same time. At the last point of developing Sonic we were doing tests with splitscreen in order to allow two players to play at the same time. But my technical capability wasn't enough to allow the game to be completed with this feature. When we began work on *Sonic 2*, we tested this first to ensure a two-player game system was achieved before properly starting the project. We also tried to prepare a sound select screen, with pictures of Sonic's band, and Sonic singing and break-dancing. The pictures were mostly completed but we couldn't complete this feature fully on schedule, so it was rejected. But the storage on the ROM to put this feature in was available because of this, so we added the "Sega" voice on the part where we showed the Sega logo.

How did you create *Sonic's* fantastic soundtrack?
It was just around the time when music in games was first getting exciting, so we asked Masato Nakamura, a member of Dreams Come True (a famous pop band in Japan) to make the music for each stage sound like it was based on each stage's image. *Sonic* also put a lot of pressure on us not only in regards to the music but the sound FX and jingles. We fixed these quite a lot to allow them to make players feel good while they play the game.



VIRTUA RACING 1994

SEGA AM2

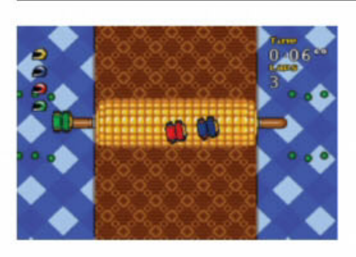
It's still astonishing to think that Sega's high-powered arcade game made it to the Mega Drive. Insanely expensive at its time of release (£70) due to the need for a custom made Sega Virtua Processor chip, it wowed reviewers at the time, and featured all the key elements of the arcade hit.

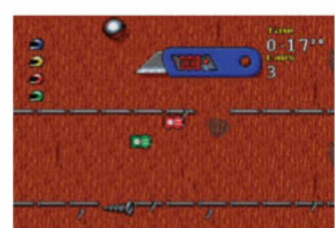
SONIC & KNUCKLES 1994

SONIC TEAM

This is effectively the second part of *Sonic 3* (Sega decided to split the game due to time constraints and memory capacity costs) with Sonic and Knuckles available as playable characters. Its main claim to fame was its "lock-on technology", which changed the first three *Sonic* games if they were inserted into the game's spare cartridge slot.







MICRO MACHINES 2: TURBO TOURNAMENT 1994

SUPERSONIC SOFTWARE

This superb top-down racer greatly improved on the original in every way. There were far more vehicles to choose from, a new 'mini micros' mode, as well as an intense 16-player knockout tournament. Earlier versions also utilised the J-Cart, while it was also possible for two players to use a single joypad. It remains the ultimate Mega Drive party game.

SOLEIL 1994

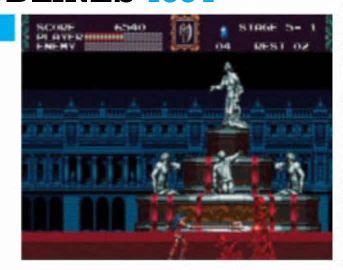
NEXTTECH



This charming little adventure game featured music composed by Motokazu Shinoda, a professional pianist and composer. It's very *Zelda*-like in its gameplay, but was notable for the addition of 16 animal companions that ranged from dodos to lions and would help you out in numerous ways. Oh, and it features a sunbathing Sonic as well.

CASTLEVANIA BLOODLINES 1994

KONAMI



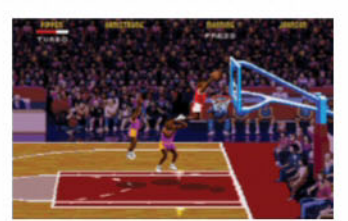
Like *Contra: Hard Corps*, *Bloodlines* was a technically astounding Mega Drive game that pulled off all sorts of neat effects. Two players were available, which allowed for different routes though the game, while the bosses were just as impressive as earlier games in the series. Sadly, it's now insanely expensive.

SUPER STREET FIGHTER II: THE NEW CHALLENGERS 1994

CAPCOM

The second Mega Drive *Street Fighter* game was a big improvement and not just because it added Cammy, T-Hawk, Dee Jay and Fei-Long. Capcom pretty much rebuilt the engine from scratch, which meant it looked vastly superior to its earlier Mega Drive game. The downside was that it required a special bank switching mapper unit, which drove its cost up.





NBA JAM: TOURNAMENT EDITION 1995

IGUANA ENTERTAINMENT

This excellent port of the popular arcade game featured a number of key improvements. Players could now pick the same teams (allowing for better balanced matches) the gameplay had been sped up and improved, while the addition of 'Hot Spots' added a much-needed layer of strategy.

THEME PARK 1995

BULLFROG

Management games were relatively scarce on the Mega Drive, so *Theme Park* was a welcome addition. Managing the expectation of your visitors and ensuring you had a good mix of rides was as absorbing in 1995 as it is today.





ALIEN SOLDIER 1995

TREASURE

Few Mega Drive games pushed the system as much as this frantic run-and-gun. It was effectively a gigantic boss rush with a seemingly never-ending supply of challenging enemies that required intimate knowledge of the game's weapon system in order to defeat them. It's now very expensive.

MORE TO TRY

- SHADOW DANCER, SEGA, 1990
- FIFA INTERNATIONAL SOCCER, EXTENDED PLAY PRODUCTIONS, 1993
- ZOMBIE ATE MY NEIGHBOURS, LUCASARTS, 1993
- SHADOWRUN, FASA, 1994
- SUPER SKIDMARKS, ACID, 1995
- SONIC 3D BLAST, TRAVELLER'S TALES, 1996
- VECTORMAN 2, BLUESKY SOFTWARE, 1996
- THE LOST WORLD: JURASSIC PARK, APPALOOSA INTERACTIVE, 1997

BEHIND THE SCENES

VIGILANTE 8

Following the success of Interstate 76, Activision turned to newbie developer Luxoflux to produce a console spin-off. Created by a team of just five members, this is the story of Vigilante 8...



Released: 1998/1999
Format: PlayStation, Nintendo 64, Game Boy Color
Publisher: Activision
Developer: Luxoflux Corp.
Key Staff: Peter Morawiec, Adrian Stephens, Edvard Toth, David Goodrich, Jeremy Engleman (all designers/developers)

WHEN BUDDING SCREENWRITER ZACHARY NORMAN WAS HIRED BY ACTIVISION IN THE MID-NINETIES, IT SET INTO MOTION A CHAIN OF EVENTS THAT WOULD LEAD TO THE CREATION OF VIGILANTE 8. In league with Sean Vesce, Dan Stanfill and other key personnel, the result was *Interstate '76*, a funky and cinematic vehicular combat game that placed players in an alternate Seventies world where the oil crisis of that decade never went away. It's a cheerless scenario, and one that is told via souped-up, deadly vehicles and discordant vigilantes.

Interstate '76 was released on PC in 1997 to generally positive reviews and sales. Keen to accentuate the cinematic side of videogames, Activision itself was pleased with the result, and soon pondered about how to approach another platform with its fresh IP. Working at Sega of America as a game designer and producer, was Peter Morawiec; together with software engineer Adrian Stephens, the pair were based in a small satellite office in Burbank, California. "We were approached by Howard Marks of Activision," begins Morawiec, "who was interesting in funding a team to develop for the PlayStation. At that time, Sega was in reorganisation, the Saturn was floundering and we were between projects, so after a great run it seemed like the right time to try something new." The result was Luxoflux, a new developer co-owned by the two men and based in Santa Monica, California. "Howard was basically looking for a console adaptation of Activision's *Interstate '76* franchise," recalls Morawiec, "but since that game was more of a serious adventure-type simulation, ultimately we ended up using it as more of a springboard for a completely new arcade-style game. Nothing was converted or used from *Interstate*; both the technology and the assets were developed anew."



As befitted Luxoflux's freshly minted status, the roles of its two members, Morawiec and Stephens were initially all-encompassing, as the former explains. "My duties involved being the lead designer, plus, suddenly, being an all-round small business owner: securing leases, hiring, legal and accounting." Stephens remained throughout the sole programmer. He says, "As with *Comix Zone* [Morawiec and Stephens's previous collaboration at Sega], Peter did the design and art and I created the technology, which involved creating a game engine for the PlayStation and developing all the tools we needed to create the game assets, such as a terrain/level editor and 3DSMax plugins."

[ACTIVISION] WAS BASICALLY LOOKING FOR A CONSOLE ADAPTATION OF ACTIVISION'S INTERSTATE '76 FRANCHISE
PETER MORAWIEC

By the time *Vigilante 8* shipped, the team was up to grand total of five, with Edvard Toth, Jeremy Engleman and David Goodrich all on board. "It was a large effort for such a small team," continues Morawiec. "I created the overall game design, characters, built the vehicles, weapons, effects and also did some sound design." With Stephens occupied on coding duties, it was soon apparent the pair needed someone to begin artwork design. One of those people was Edvard Toth. "I was still in the UK when Peter hired me," he says, "and one of the pre-requisites was to check out *Interstate '76*. I really enjoyed the all-in commitment to the Seventies theme." Toth had gained invaluable experience in the UK working for famous developer Psygnosis where he had designed and developed the cult RPG *Perihelion: The Prophecy*. Nevertheless, he jumped at the chance to join Morawiec and Stephens in California. Also with the team by this time were Jeremy Engleman and artist David Goodrich. "I had been approached by Activision for an artist role on its *Battlezone* reboot," recalls Goodrich, "However the position had been filled the



A close encounter in Nugget City.



day I was interviewing. I guess I interviewed well, because they asked me back a few days later to meet the Luxoflux team." Goodrich met with Morawiec, Stephens and Engleman in their small office in Santa Monica. "They were interviewing me for an artist position that mainly involved making all objects and vehicles in the game destructible, something that was rarely seen in games of that time." Having graduated from a large studio, Goodrich was sceptical of the size of *Vigilante 8*'s team. "I had some concerns about such a small group successfully making it to launch, but I confess this was a hasty conclusion on my part, especially considering the subsequent success of Luxoflux and its games." However, the proposed scenario for *Vigilante 8* endeared itself greatly to the new recruit. "I researched *Interstate '76* once I knew I was going for the interview, so I could get a feel for the game I would be modelling on. I was amazed by it, the stylised visuals, Seventies funk and car customisations caught my interest immediately, and the storyline was also engaging and entertaining."

So having introduced the team, what about the game itself? As with *Interstate '76*, global tensions surrounding the shortage of oil are a key element behind *Vigilante 8*'s plot. The nefarious Oil Monopoly Alliance Regime (OMAR) is seeking to monopolise the world's oil trade and is opposed by just one remaining country: the United States of America. With shortages of gasoline causing a near-economic breakdown in the country, OMAR hires professional terrorist Sid Burn to organise troops in the American Southwest and begin targeting oil refineries and other commercial installations throughout the region. Desperate for help, civilians have decided to take the law into their own hands and formed a band of defenders known as the Vigilantes. The player can take on the role of either a member of the Vigilantes or Sid Burn's cadre of villains known as the Coyotes, with each character having its own specific ending. Recalls Morawiec, "To be honest, the characters and their backstories were developed in the service of the vehicle selection, a sort-of gameplay-first approach. In other words, the vehicles came first, then we brainstormed suitable characters to go with each car, weaving a storyline to connect it all together."

Despite the clear influence of *Interstate '76*, involvement of the original team in *Vigilante 8* was kept to bare minimum, as Morawiec reveals. "We had a couple of brief discussions with Zack and his team early on, but I could tell they weren't very keen on our direction. I probably would have felt the same, their vision of the franchise was a lot more intellectual and realistic,

THE CAST OF VIGILANTE 8

They're the driving force (pun intended) behind Vigilante 8's plot and cars. Here's a rundown of some the most notable heroes and villains of the piece.



CHASSEY BLUE

The glamour girl of the Vigilantes, Chassey is a beauty queen and secret government agent rolled into one svelte package.
CAR: 1967 Rattler
SPECIAL WEAPON: Gridlock, a set of expanding flares capable of damaging any engine within range.
CATCHPHRASE: "Let's get on with the mission, hm?"



LOKI

An ex-test pilot of secret weapons – rumour has it that he's flown an actual flying saucer! Member of the Coyotes.
CAR: 1973 Glenn 4x4
SPECIAL WEAPON: Scatter Missiles, three missiles pimped with cluster bomb tips. Nice!
CATCHPHRASE: "Fasten your seatbelts and get ready for take-off!"



HOUSTON 3

A reluctant member of the Coyotes, Houston 3 is half-human, half-machine and programmed to cause destruction and chaos.
CAR: 1975 Palamino
SPECIAL WEAPON: Super Fantastic Death Ray 3-Ax, a fantastic weapon for a fantastic character.
CATCHPHRASE: "I may be half human, but I'm all woman"



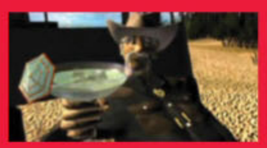
JOHN TORQUE

Ex-gambler, Torque is now recruited into the Vigilantes, and its leader's right hand man.
CAR: 1969 Jefferson
SPECIAL WEAPON: Bass Quake, a mammoth stereo speaker than engulfs enemies in devastating earthquakes!
CATCHPHRASE: "You ready to roll the dice, Bro?"



SID BURN

The leader of the Coyotes, Burn is a brutal and committed arsonist. And a complete and utter git to boot.
CAR: 1969 Manta
SPECIAL WEAPON: Breath Of Fire, a homemade flamethrower that sets any enemies on fire. Crispy!
CATCHPHRASE: "Is it getting hot in here?"



CONVOY

The Vigilantes' supreme leader, and an ex-trucker who has taken the law into his own hands.
CAR: 1972 Moth Truck
SPECIAL WEAPON: Steel Belter, tyres laden with explosives that do massive damage to enemy vehicles. Pow!
CATCHPHRASE: "Ain't nothin' on Earth gonna stop a convoy"



A funky opening movie introduces some of Vigilante 8's characters, as well as setting up the plot.



Roaming the streets of the Las Vegas-esque Nugget City.

WHAT THEY SAID...

An original and enjoyable game, although screaming around and blowing up buildings only has limited appeal. Lacks a decent in-depth theme for the quest mode

PlayStation Power, August 1998

but it just wasn't going to translate to the console well. Rebranding it to more a combat arena shooting game was probably the right idea." As lead coder, Adrian Stephens got to liaise with the *Interstate* team close up. "I spent a day with Activision's internal *I76* team," he recalls, "sitting in one person's office or cubicle at a time, trying to understand the decisions they'd made and the pitfalls they'd come across in the process. At that point I think we were still imagining a closer port than we ended up going for." Given a huge dump of code, Stephens was predictably overwhelmed by the hugeness of the Activision game. In view of Zachary Norman's scriptwriting background, *Interstate '76* was developed mainly from script to gameplay; *Vigilante 8* reversed this method of working.

Edvard Toth recalls the influence of *Interstate* and another memorable PlayStation game. "I think the primary seed of the idea was to re-use the over-the-top characters and premise from *Interstate* in a pure car combat game, with the intention of taking on Sony's own *Twisted Metal* series. Initially I thought it was a bit goofy, but it rapidly sucked me in. Our game was extremely fun to play, and there was a kind of disarming authenticity and charm to the characters and the whole package in general that was hard to resist." David Goodrich agrees. "Visually *Vigilante 8* was amazing for the time, and in my opinion it set a new standard for PlayStation visuals. The game was already oozing with style from the inspiration of *Interstate*." Goodrich, despite being a relative newcomer to the project, wasted little time in putting forward suggestions for improvements to

OPINION WAS DIVIDED OVER VEHICLE CONTROL. I FELT THEY SHOULD HANDLE LIKE VEHICLES, EVERYONE ELSE THOUGHT THEY SHOULDN'T!
ADRIAN STEPHENS

Vigilante 8's gameplay. "While I was initially hired to handle the world destruction assets, I also ended up doing a lot of game design as well." Given that at the time the game was being developed by a four-man team, this sort of overlap was inevitable. "We had to wear a lot of hats to get things done. Like, while they had a lot of basic components already in place, I felt it lacked a combat system with strategic depth. Being a car combat fanatic, I wasted no time suggesting how we could add a deeper combat system. Fortunately, Peter

FROM PSX TO N64

Almost one year after PlayStation Vigilante 8, the Nintendo console got a shiny new version…

■ THE SAME team behind the PlayStation version of *Vigilante 8* was responsible for its Nintendo 64 port, and they made sure it was improved in several areas. Firstly, there was the obvious inclusion of a four-player option to take advantage of the N64's multiple native ports. While the sound was limited by the shift to cartridge format, the graphics were notably improved, with several impressive lighting effects and more destructible environments added. Best of all, however, was an extra level called Super Dreamland 64, a discernible nod towards *Super Mario 64*, including a castle surrounded by a moat and a smattering of cute animals. As befits the theme, anything struck or shot transforms into a flock of butterflies. Aaaaaahhh.







Vigilante 8 Review

The most important things to note about the N64 version of Vigilante 8 is that it has a new level that wasn't in the PlayStation version, and that it supports four-player simultaneous play

Gamespot, March 1999

and Adrian listened to my ideas, despite me being a newcomer."

Goodrich's suggestions improved the gameplay immeasurably. *Vigilante 8*'s original template was composed of just driving and shooting enemies, with whatever weapon was currently installed. Goodrich added combo moves akin to the aforementioned *Twisted Metal* and even fighting games such as *Street Fighter*, to give the player a broader range of offensive and defensive moves. This included missiles that confused homing weapons, mines with which to trap enemy cars and set them up for an attack, and weapons that would push an enemy away, useful for when players found themselves surrounded. "The new weapon combo system led to some brutal attack strategies," says Goodrich proudly, "but they seemed like they should have been more damaging than they were." Combat, the meat and drink of *Vigilante 8*, lasted too long as the player could empty an entire barrage before the enemy escaped and grabbed some health, returning refreshed to the combat zone. "So I came up with the 'whammy' system," explains Goodrich, "which increased the damage of each attack that lands within a split second. I ran this by Peter and he was all for it. This allowed skilled players to take out enemies quickly, and also added satisfying results to a barrage of attacks." In addition to this, Goodrich drew inspiration from another famous fighting game. "I took note of *Mortal Kombat*'s fatality mechanic: our version was called 'total' after totalling a car'," he grins. "If you brought an enemy car's health down to zero, and then performed a special attack or combo, it would launch the vehicle into mid-air and blow it up." The result was over-the-top, yet undeniably satisfying.

Pushing all these ideas around the PlayStation was Adrian Stephens, *Vigilante 8*'s lead coder. "Adrian is simply an amazing coder," say Goodrich. "I recall on a few occasions telling him that a feature we had was more polished in another game, in an attempt to goad him into implementing it." The one major sticking point among the small team was between Stephens in particular and Activision, as Toth explains. "There was an on-going real-



■ With Luxoflux busy on *2nd Offense*, the inevitably 2D GBC version was ported by another developer.

vs-fake physics debate that stuck with the project. One side were unwavering proponents of using real physics on the vehicles, with multiple points of suspension, springs, mass and momentum. The other side – which I think included our producer from Activision – pushed for 'fake' physics that would have made the vehicles stick better to the terrain and exhibit more predictable behaviour in general." Stephens himself recalls more the technical issues of embracing a new technology over any design conflicts. "We were a fledgling company with no PlayStation experience," he says, "although each new hurdle kind of made you forget all the hurdles before. But I do remember trying – and failing – to write a terrain editor using direct X and MFC. Getting the physics of the vehicles right was a struggle throughout development – and beyond!" In mild conflict with Goodrich, Stephens recalls a slightly different take on the vehicle physics design. "Yes, opinion was divided over vehicle control. I felt they should handle like vehicles, everyone else thought they shouldn't! I'm exaggerating, but personally I prefer games where mastering the controls is integral to the game, like *Defender* or *Joust*."

As you'd expect with a new team working on a particular format for the first time, there were other technical issues, as Goodrich recalls. "There were frame rate issues when we had too many explosions,

WE ALL THOUGHT IT WAS A GREAT COMMERCIAL – BUT THE TIMING WAS UNFORTUNATE

PETER MORAWIEC ON THE NINTENDO 64 SCHOOL BUS ADVERT



> A GAMING EVOLUTION Twisted Metal > Vigilante 8 > Vigilante 8: 2nd Offense



Twisted Metal lay down the template for arcade vehicular combat. *Vigilante 8* refined the concept, making it more fluid.



2nd Offense successfully repeated the *Vigilante 8* formula but came unstuck against *Twisted Metal 4*.



but that was mainly my fault. I was hired to create the destructibles and in an attempt to make it more exciting, I initially used too many." Fortunately Stephens was on hand to set up a system where Goodrich could offset the explosions with a timer, limiting the number on screen at any one time. A bigger problem lay with the car physics themselves. Under certain circumstances, vehicles were prone to jump hundreds of feet in the air upon striking obstacles, making them unfairly vulnerable to enemy fire. Constant play testing failed to locate the bug, until, towards the end of development, Goodrich persuaded Stephens to have final look at it. "I left for lunch, still annoyed at this imperfection in the gameplay, and returned to find that Adrian had had an 'A-ha!' moment, and he ended up fixing the issue hours before our final submission to Activision.

Post-release, *Vigilante 8* received good reviews, with critics and gamers alike unconcerned with the game's lack of frills. A few months after the game's release, however, controversy struck, and Activision and Luxoflux found itself at the centre of a media storm. The latter were busy developing *Vigilante 8*'s follow up, *2nd Offense*, the former promoting the original game and the imminent Nintendo 64 version. One such promotion involved the school bus from the game, a ridiculously over-the-top vehicle (in keeping with the rest of the game) and into this fragile situation came the Columbine tragedy. Edvard Toth remembers, "Despite our bus being really cartoony, the game still received a lot of negative media attention as the finger-pointing at videogame violence kicked into high gear." A live-action TV advertisement for the Nintendo 64 version, featuring a bullet-ridden and burned out school bus was hardly a salve on tensions, and the school bus in the sequel was quickly changed to a less-controversial prison bus. "We all thought it was a great commercial," says Morawiec, "very funny and light-hearted, just like the game itself – but the timing was unfortunate. I believe *Vigilante 8* even figured in one of President Clinton's addresses on videogame violence, and while I'm not a fan of ultra-violent games, I didn't really see our game as such. So it was a surprising development."

As mentioned, *Vigilante 8* was successful enough to spawn an immediate sequel in *2nd Offense*. "The indications from the marketplace were very positive," recalls Morawiec. "I remember walking into Hollywood Video the day of release and these boys rushed in, eagerly asking the clerk about *V8*, which I thought was a good omen." Ultimately, *Vigilante 8* sold far beyond everyone's expectations at both Activision and Luxoflux. The effect this had on the latter was significant, as Morawiec continues. "*Vigilante 8* legitimised our studio as one of the better upcoming devs of the PS1/N64 era. It allowed us to move onto bigger projects, and by partnering with Activision we grew from two employees to 100-plus within eight years or so. It was a bumpy ride at times, but an amazing experience nonetheless."

Luxoflux co-founder Stephens has fond memories of the development process too, despite the long nights and coding death marches. "*Vigilante 8* remains the most positive and rewarding game development process I've ever had. It wasn't easy but we never got bogged down, and every bit of progress felt like a hard-won group achievement." The development of *Vigilante 8* can be seen as a bridge, the last one perhaps, between the small coding teams of the Eighties and early Nineties, and the modern gaming behemoths of today. "It was one of those rare experiences where every team member had a say and made a significant impact on the game's outcome," says Goodrich, who found art, animation, design, play-testing and even helping to write the game's Prima guide, roles he took on. "Don't get me wrong, it wasn't all sugar and sunshine; we worked very long hours and late nights for many months, and by the end we were exhausted. But what we created was satisfying, and worth it. I'm very proud of the work we all did on that game."

It may not have been the most complex of games, and eschewed many of its forebear's intricacies in favour of all-out action. But there's no doubting for those road hogs looking for frantic vehicular combat on the PlayStation, there was no equal.



An example of the handy mission explanation screen.



Choose your route in the Quest mode screen.



Despite the team's best efforts, the PlayStation version occasionally struggled when things got hectic.



A DECLARATION OF LOVE

"The *Micro Machines* disc for the Philips CD-i version of the game included a file in which Ashley Hogg declared his love of a woman called Kathryn Spencer. But who was she? "She was someone who I knew through local theatre and actually to me, she felt more like the sister I never had rather than a romantic interest. I was quite young and had been through a few rough patches with work and money and the usual life stuff, and she was just one of those people who you could get on with really easily.""





RETRO INTERVIEW

ASHLEY HOGG

With a successful career spanning three decades, developer Ashley Hogg was among the first developers to create games on CD and for 3DTVs

SELECT GAMEOGRAPHY



CJ's Elephant Antics (1991) Design and music



Micro Machines (1995) Code and audio



Invincible Tiger (2009) Technical team

HAVING STARTED HIS career as a freelance coder in 1990, Ashley Hogg has seen the gaming industry progress through many different generations. He began his career by creating budget games for the Commodore 64 and worked on games that featured some of the industry's best-loved characters, CJ and Dizzy. He also found himself working on Philips's ill-fated CD-i, a host of licensed titles and an innovative game called *Invincible Tiger* which was played with the aid of 3D glasses. Now working at Radiant Worlds on *SkySaga*, and with experience as a coder, artist and musician under his belt, he's in a very good position to look back over gaming's phenomenal evolution.

When did you first become interested in games and what grabbed you about them?

I had grown up around computers because my father was a systems analyst at the local university, although to begin with I didn't have any particular interest in them – they were just something I got to play around with when I visited my dad at his workplace. Then my older cousin got a Spectrum for Christmas when it first came out, and once I tried it out, I was immediately hooked. I got one for myself the following Christmas when I was about ten or 11 years old and I just played the games for a couple of years. After playing around for a couple of years on the Spectrum, I then began tinkering with BASIC programming. After that I got my own Commodore 64 and I played loads of games on that too but I also continued to play around with the coding.

As you got older, did programming start to replace playing games?

I slowly began using assembler language when I was 14 or 15 years old. Most of the stuff that I was coding on the C64 (and on the Commodore Amiga, which I got a year or two later) was terrible but it was all just experimentation. I was just teaching myself. There was no internet and I barely knew anyone else who programmed, so that kind of self-learning was essential for me. It was a lot of fun, if very frustrating at times.

I JUST ABOUT MANAGED TO FULFIL MY CHILDHOOD DREAM OF PRODUCING SOME C64 SOUNDTRACKS

How did Genesis Software come about in the early 1990s?

Genesis was just a gathering of David Clarke, Jon Smyth (now Jon Temples) and myself. We met each other through a local computer shop and were friends for a fair amount of time. When Dave and Jon came up with *CJ's Elephant Antics* on the C64, I asked if I could write it on the Amiga, mostly because I thought that it was a really cool game but also because by doing it, I thought I could learn a lot. It wasn't long before we had signed it to Codemasters and that was just the most amazing thing. Dave had previously worked at Choice Software, a small outfit doing conversions for Ocean, but this was my very first intro to the games industry.



Did you start to think programming could be a viable career?

After we wrapped up *CJ*, Dave and Jon had started working on *Nobby The Aardvark* and amazingly Thalamus [the software label for the British magazine publisher Newsfield Publications] was really keen and wanted to sign it. For us, this seemed like the big-time, and essentially I dropped out of my A-levels so that we could set up a small office and be 'proper' developers. To be honest, we had no real clue what we were doing and the money was terrible but it was unbelievably exciting at first. Eventually though, it all went a little wrong. Newsfield and Thalamus went bust and although the C64 game was very far along in development, the Amiga version was trailing. Things were very uncertain during that time and I couldn't afford to let things drag along, so I ended up moving close to Codemasters where there was a lot of freelance work going.

You not only programmed games but created music for them too, right?

I primarily wanted to be a musician – I was totally inspired by the likes of Martin Galway, Rob Hubbard and Dave Whittaker. A lot of my early assembler programming was working out how to write my own audio code and how to get decent sounds out of the SID chip. I am so happy that I just about managed to fulfil my childhood dream of producing some C64 soundtracks, even if it was quite late in the system's lifespan. At the same time I was programming games themselves on the 16-bit systems, and I think I realised my future lay there rather than in music.

Can you remember your work on the *Spike In Transylvania* soundtrack – Jon Temples said a lot of effort had been put into the game?

I can't honestly remember much about it in detail – but Jon is right, there was a lot of work put into that game by all of us. The *CJ* music had taken a lot of effort because I was still refining my audio code and experimenting a lot and making it was a complete blast. Spike came quite quickly after that, and music-wise felt like more of the same – it was a great chance for me to spend time experimenting with the code and just enjoying the whole creative experience.

After freelancing and moving to Codemasters, you worked on the CD-i version of *Micro Machines*. Where did the idea for the conversion come from?

Philips realised CD-i wasn't working as an 'edutainment' system and it wanted some hot games. It approached a number of companies including Codemasters. I don't think the Codies would have been interested, but a few years before this I had spoken to Philips myself about doing games on the platform but it hadn't really gone anywhere. I said I wouldn't mind taking on the project to convert *Micro Machines*, and so a deal was done.



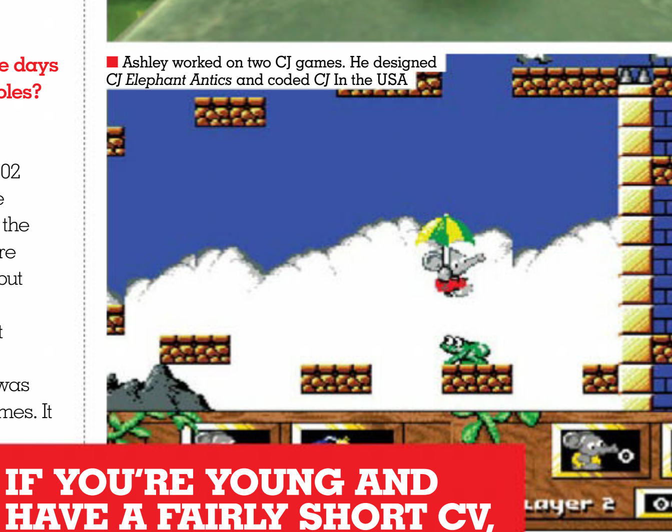
■ Ashley Hogg had experience of Philips' CD-i console and so he was a natural choice to convert *Micro Machines* to the platform

How did you find working with CD in the days before they were commonplace in consoles? Was it a tricky conversion?

It was a little annoying because I had to convert the code from the original NES 6502 assembler to 68000 assembler used in the CD-i. Since Codies had already released the Sega Megadrive version of the game, there was already a 68000 port in all the code, but for some reason (presumably something contractual with that programmer) I didn't have access to that code. But on top of that, we quickly discovered that the CD-i was fairly woefully equipped for fast action games. It took a fair bit of effort to get a decent multi-way scrolling system up and running and cram in all the sprite animations and so on. The latter phases were very time consuming because to test the game on an actual machine we had to burn the discs – this was at a time when CD writers were huge and only burned at single speed, so it was about 45-60 minutes a time between writing a fix and testing it on the real console. The discs also cost about £15 each, and I went through a lot of those during the last few months of development. This was also the first project where I used a PC for development. I had used an Amiga for everything before (many of us at Codies used top-end A4000s for our work), and the PC felt so unbelievably old-fashioned by comparison. A year or two later, when Commodore were dying and Windows 95 had come out, the whole thing changed so rapidly – it was very sad for a die-hard Amiga guy like myself.

You also worked on *Dizzy* but it was toward the end of the franchise's life. How was it and did you feel the character had run its course?

It was great. Although I'd never really played any of the *Dizzy* games, it was amazing to help out with finishing the Sega Megadrive version. The main programmer was someone who I previously knew from the Amiga demo scene and I like to think we got on really well finishing the game. It was my very first console project, which was very exciting. I got to know Philip and Andrew Oliver too and I've ended up working for them over many years in my career. They're straight-up, great guys.



■ Ashley worked on two CJ games. He designed *CJ Elephant Antics* and coded *CJ In the USA*

IF YOU'RE YOUNG AND HAVE A FAIRLY SHORT CV, HAVING YOUR PROJECT CANCELLED FEELS LIKE YOU'VE BEEN CHEATED

What was Codemasters like to work for and what was life in Leamington Spa like then?

It was just crazy. It felt quite chaotic at times, most people were freelance and there were projects starting and stopping all the time. It was incredibly lively and there was always loads of socialising going on out of hours. I had come down almost straight out of school and from a quiet town too so suddenly everything seemed bright and full of wonder.

Could you see real changes in the industry throughout the 1990s?

Oh, I certainly could. With the launch of Sony's PlayStation for example, there was an almost sudden feeling of maturity throughout the industry. The quality bar jumped overnight and games like *WipEout*, which had CD music from the likes of Chemical Brothers, brought a whole new level to gaming.





Today, Ashley Hogg works for Radiant Worlds helping to product the Minecraft-inspired *SkySaga*

BLITZING THE INDUSTRY

"Ashley Hogg worked on a cross-platform middleware when he was at Blitz Games Studios called BlitzTech. It was licensed to other developers and it supported top quality graphics, physics, artificial intelligence and various techniques such as real-time lighting and shadows. Games such as *Reservoir Dogs*, *The House Of The Dead: Overkill*, *The Mummy Returns*, *Droplitz* and a range of games created for sale at Burger King made use of it."

What happened at the end of the decade? There seems to be a lack of credits for you. Did you take a break?
I wish! In the second half of the 90s, I worked on some unreleased projects: a flight simulator called *Dawn Patrol* for Empire, *Bloodlust* for System 3 and *Joe Blow* for Abstract/Telstar. Then I joined Runecraft in 1999 and worked on a PlayStation port of the N64 *Earthworm Jim 3D*, which was sadly canned after a while.

How frustrating is it to work so hard on something that is then canned?
Well, you kind of get used to it after your first few canned projects! It certainly can be frustrating. It's not satisfying to work on something that never gets released. However, personally I think it's worse when you're younger because it tends to start unravelling your dreams that the games industry is this perfect place. But also, if you're young and have a fairly short CV, having your project cancelled feels like you've been cheated a little of a nice addition to that CV. Not to mention that, in many cases, a project cancellation results in job losses. It's a sad reality that this is the common case, and let's be honest, that's materially worse than losing a credit on your CV or watching a year of work get shelved.

Did you apply to join Blitz Games Studios or did the Olivers approach you?
I'd met Philip on a couple of random occasions, then when I found myself between jobs in late 2001 I dropped him a line and we had a talk. So I interviewed at Blitz, and joined their technology team, where I stayed for 11.5 years.

Blitz made a good number of licenses, was there a difference in how you approached them when compared to original titles?
In all honesty, I have never been involved in the design process. At Blitz, I was always part of the technology team, so didn't work directly on any of the games.

But there were some amazing originals, pushing the boundaries of tech, not least *Invincible Tiger*. What was this like to work on and do you think it was ahead of its time?
I thought that was a great little game, and the one driving thing about it was 3DTV. Andrew Oliver was heavily convinced about 3DTV. I have to say I wasn't too keen myself, but it was very interesting. At the time we managed to get hold of a lot of prototype TVs from manufacturers, and it was fascinating to see the different approaches. There was one where the screen had an almost honeycomb-like structure, it might have been from Philips. Getting a decent viewing angle on that was hard work.

Now you are working on *SkySaga*. It's a very modern game but is it far removed from those you created in the early days?
Absolutely. Back in the 8-bit days I could never have envisaged games looking like this. I'll bet in ten years' time games will look even more brilliant, but the inner child of me keeps thinking: "But how can it get any better?" I'm not really involved in modern graphics techniques so I'm probably actually quite easy to impress.

So what is your most stark memory from your time in gaming?
Most probably the wonder of being gathered around my cousin's Spectrum all those years ago, as we all watched *Manic Miner* in amazement. It was quite mesmerising.

The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time spent close to four years in active development, encompassing a team of 120 staff, it was (at the time) one of the largest undertakings in Nintendo's history.

GAME CHANGERS

TLOZ: OCARINA OF TIME

Released: 21 November 1998 **Publisher:** Nintendo **Developer:** Nintendo EAD **System:** N64

Largely considered to be the greatest game of all time and one of the most important releases of the modern era, the hero of time's N64 adventure is a classic that every gamer should play

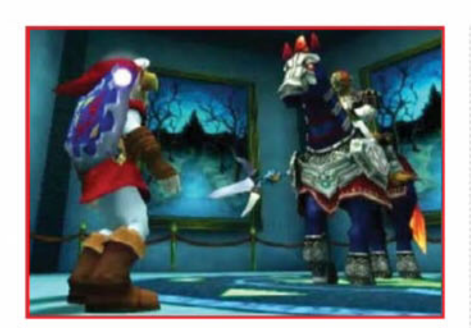
HEY! LISTEN! When it comes to legitimate industry game changers, they don't come much bigger or influential than *The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time*. Developed in tandem with *Super Mario 64*, the hero of time's N64 debut would land two years later (in 1998) but would arguably have a larger impact on the design and direction of 3D adventure games in the years to follow. *Ocarina Of Time* established the template for the genre; it impressed with its bold and intricate dungeon design, engaging narrative and vast, sprawling overworld. In *Ocarina Of Time*, Nintendo didn't just have the technical prowess and creativity to make a fantastic game that would stand the test of time, but the courage and ingenuity to make one that would become truly revolutionary.

Looking back, it is easy enough to draw parallels between *Ocarina Of Time* and other innovative 3D games of the time, questioning the game's resonance through the decades in the process. Argonaut Software's *Croc: Legend of the Gobbos*, Core Design's *Tomb Raider* and, of course, Nintendo's own *Super Mario 64*, being the obvious examples – each arriving some years earlier – but still Link's adventure is so revered to this day, credited with evolving a genre, but why is that?

Perhaps it's because *Ocarina Of Time* had it all. That isn't an overstatement either; we're just giving credit where credit is due. In *Zelda*, Nintendo was able to provide a compelling showcase for the N64 – just as many were ready to call time on the 32-bit era of gaming. It began life as one of the first 3D projects at Nintendo EAD, with every aspect of the game (from its central game mechanics to its evocative world design) arriving as the result of wild experimentation and careful iteration. It's a game born from creativity – in 1994 when development first began there wasn't anything of its scale to compare it with.

BEST BOSSES

THE COOLEST AND MOST MEMORABLE FIGHTS IN OOT



PHANTOM GANON

★ Arriving in a spectacular fashion, just as Link attempts to leave the haunted gallery, Phantom Ganon is a fantastically challenging battle that also gives us a hint as to what could have been had development of the game gone differently.



SHADOW LINK

★ Many players may loathe the Water Temple, but it happened to give us one of the coolest encounters in *The Legend Of Zelda* history. It's full of twists and turns, memorable not because of its challenge but because of its symmetry to your own fighting style.



TWINROVA

★ This boss battle pushes Link to redirect fire and ice blasts back at Kotake and Koume before the Sorceress Sisters team up and attack more ferociously. It forces players to adapt to the rhythm of battle, which is now a staple of boss fights in the *Zelda* franchise.

The result is a technical masterpiece. Many of the actions and mechanics exhibited in *Ocarina Of Time* might be commonplace now, but that's because their debut here struck such a chord with developers across the globe. While *Super Mario 64* showed a generation how camera control and navigating 3D spaces should and could work successfully, it was *Ocarina Of Time* that showed how gaming had finally evolved to let us truly exist in, and interact, with a living, breathing 3D world.

Context-sensitive actions and the introduction of lock-on Z-Targeting are just two of the staples of the genre that *Ocarina Of Time* introduced: enduring innovations that solved many of the problems that plagued playability in those few 3D action-adventure games released before it. The sprawling vastness of the Hyrule overworld created a sense of unrivalled wonder and place, though it was your interaction within it that made it truly ground-breaking.

And to think, we almost didn't receive Hyrule as it is now at all. At the time, *Ocarina Of Time* was the largest game Nintendo had ever tried to create, and Shigeru Miyamoto had big concerns over the storage memory capacity of the N64's cartridge. The solution was to engineer a hub area similar to that of *Super Mario 64*'s painting-filled castle, where Link would warp to the various areas and dungeons of Hyrule through portals out of Ganondorf's towering structure – a process of development that ultimately led to the incarnation of the boss battle with Phantom Ganon in the Forest Temple.

Thankfully, Nintendo found a solution to its problems – creating a sparse, realistic game world that cleverly echoed the narrative and invited exploration – and that led to some of the most breathtaking moments of *Ocarina Of Time*. While a lot has been said over the years of the invocative time-travel mechanic – the sheer scope of Hyrule was, well, breathtaking. At the time a world that large, teeming with NPCs and enemies, interconnected pathways, dungeons and hub areas, were an unimaginable feet of technical engineering.

But there it all was, a game world encouraging exploration and experimentation. That combined with a masterful set of dungeon designs that pushed players to explore areas long-forgotten and new corners of the map with a litany of interesting new gadgets and items (many of which reimagined cleverly from older, influential titles in the series). And yet through it all, through so much to see, do and love, Nintendo underpinned the entire experience with a modern tragedy; *Ocarina Of Time* undermined the obvious joy that was to be found in its inherent mastery with a tragic story of cyclical destruction and failure. *Ocarina Of Time* was an adult story, one that would inform a generation of creators to push the boundaries on the type of stories that could be explored in videogames.

Ocarina Of Time changed the face of modern game design. It introduced so many concepts, pushed so many boundaries and rewrote the playbook on so many mechanics and systems that its influence is almost impossible to accurately track. There's a reason *Ocarina Of Time* is largely considered to be the greatest game of all time and that's because there has never been another game like it: beautiful and haunting, joyful and daunting, playing through *Ocarina Of Time* is a defining experience, for game creators and players alike.

CONTEXT-SENSITIVE ACTIONS AND THE INTRODUCTION OF LOCK-ON Z-TARGETING ARE JUST TWO OF THE GENRE STAPLES THAT OCARINA OF TIME INTRODUCED

KEY FACTS

- *Ocarina Of Time* development originally began on the Nintendo 64DD, though it was brought to the N64 due to delays to the hardware. An expansion was put into development though ultimately cancelled, appearing as a pre-order bonus bundled with *Wind Waker* on GameCube.

- *OOT* is where the timeline splits off into three unique variations depending on your actions. Defeat at Ganon's hands leads to *A Link To The Past* in the Hyrule Decline timeline, while success can either spin into a Child or Adult variant featuring *Twilight Princess* or *Wind Waker*, respectively.



GAME CHANGERS

EIGHT FEATURES THAT MADE OCARINA OF TIME LEGENDARY

IT WASN'T JUST ABOUT BEING A 3D ZELDA AS THESE ELEMENTS HELPED ELEVATE IT TO ONE OF THE BEST GAMES OF ALL TIME



ENEMY TARGETING

■ Attacking enemies in a 3D space was always a little cumbersome in 3D action-adventure games. Or at least, it was until *Ocarina Of Time* arrived with its ingenious Z-Targeting lock-on system. A staple of the genre today, it allowed the player to intuitively snap the camera to an enemy, giving Link the freedom to circle and strafe around monsters without losing the ability to follow or dish out attacks; where would we be today without such an important game system?



PLATFORMING EXCELLENCE

■ *Super Mario 64* is a classic, a showcase for the brilliance of Nintendo in the Nineties, but it also showcased some of the pitfalls of platform navigation in a 3D space. As the two games were developed in tandem, it gave the team plenty of time to make adjustments and tweaks to the controls and camera, ultimately ensuring that – by the time that *Ocarina Of Time* was released – it handled far more confidently in the tight dungeon enclosures.



CONTEXT-SENSITIVE ACTIONS

■ With so many actions available to the player – many of which were new to gaming – Nintendo massively simplified the control system to ensure play was as smooth as possible. Context-sensitive actions allowed multiple tasks to be assigned to one button, cutting the fuss of learning too many controls and also subtly guiding the player around its environments – it let Link adventure without worry, only being given the option to move boxes or climb when Nintendo deemed it possible.



SPRAWLING OVERWORLD

■ One of the coolest aspects of *Zelda* games was the inclusion of an overworld, a hub that linked all levels, dungeons and areas together. This was expanded massively for *OOT*, a space that was large enough to make you feel like you were a small part of a world that existed around you. If you could see it, you could reach it – even if that meant searching out specific items and returning later. The sparse, realistic Hyrule overworld is still one of Nintendo's greatest accomplishments.



HEARTFELT NARRATIVE

■ Unlike most other Nintendo games released at the time – in which mechanics took precedence over all else – *OOT* had story at its centre. While joyful to playthrough, it had a dark undertone of loss and tragedy. Link's journey across timelines, to stop a disaster he inadvertently had a hand in creating, has proven to be one of gaming's greatest; the time-travel mechanics, be they via the Ocarina or Master Sword, were a powerful way of dragging players wholeheartedly into the adventure.



DUNGEON DESIGN

■ The temples in *OOT* are a marvel of 3D design and execution, with each offering challenge and reward to players ready to push their understanding of the combat and platforming mechanics. Even the Water Temple, largely considered to be the toughest challenge in the game and a headache for players the world over, has proven itself to be a masterclass in spatial awareness, demonstrating a willingness to challenge convention and take risks in every area of game design.



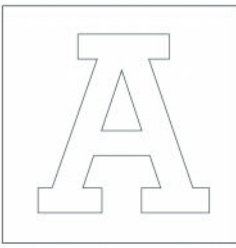
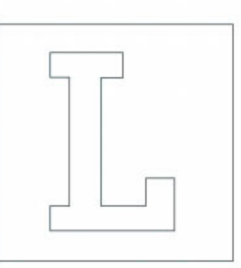
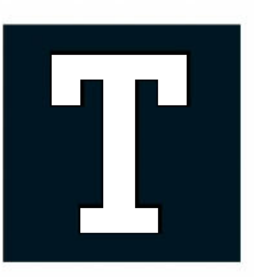
EXTENDED ADVENTURING

■ All throughout the adventure, Link will acquire and collect different items and weapons that greatly expand the adventure. Many introduced new abilities, with Nintendo gradually introducing them through well-masked tutorials in the guise of puzzle solving before letting you loose with them in boss battles and, eventually, the overworld to access new areas. It has proven to be a staple of *Zelda* design, not to mention a process carried across into various other genres and game types.



BOSS DESIGN

■ *The Legend Of Zelda* boss design has always been fairly simple: find the flashing bit of the enemy and hit it with whatever new item has just been gifted to you. That's okay though, because *OOT* masked this with memorable and striking encounters. *Zelda* bosses made a wonderful transition into 3D, always looking large enough to make the task ahead seem implausibly difficult, with impossibly-tight mechanics making it seem ultimately achievable.

THE 

The NES controller feels exactly like the original pad from the Eighties console, but are not compatible with that device.

Leaving a game and returning to the main menu of the NES Mini requires you to hit the device's Reset button.

The NES Mini comes with one controller, but a second isn't too expensive and the Wii Classic Controller can also be used.

NINTENDO CLASSIC MINI: NES

MANUFACTURER: **NINTENDO** PRICE: **£49.99**

IT'S FAIR TO say that we've taken our time over the NES Mini, playing every game, testing out its saving system, trying it out on different sizes of TV (even a 65-inch 4K display) and, frankly, we're impressed. This is everything we could have wanted it to be. The selection of games includes some of the highlights of the original system, offering a trip down memory lane for anyone who had the pleasure of growing up with the NES, and is a fantastic showcase of how the console evolved over its lifetime and was pushed by new software over time for anyone approaching it as a new system.

The NES Mini as a piece of hardware is largely excellent with only a couple of key drawbacks. The build quality, while a little lightweight, is a near-perfect miniaturisation of the original system, which is a nice touch and it's small enough to be both portable and not too imposing next to your TV. It also, smartly, uses a USB connection for power so you can plug it into your TV without eating up a socket in your wall. This does connect to one of the issues, though, as it limits the distance the NES Mini can sit away from your TV, which combined to a short cable length on the controllers means that you'll need to huddle around a TV to play, which adds to some of the nostalgia, but isn't really compatible with modern living-room gaming. Extension cables are available, of course.

And the only other issue is not being able to add more games to it via Virtual Console or any other means. We're hoping that's something that could maybe happen via the USB cable, but we won't be holding our breath. Most importantly, we would rather Nintendo spend its time on the SNES Mini.

store.nintendo.co.uk

VERDICT 9/10

GAMING CLOTHING



TRI ZIP HOODY

We thought we would pick out some winter warmers from Gametee this issue and this *Zelda* homage hoody is one of the highlights. It's another classy and subtle design for the discerning gamer.
www.gametee.co.uk



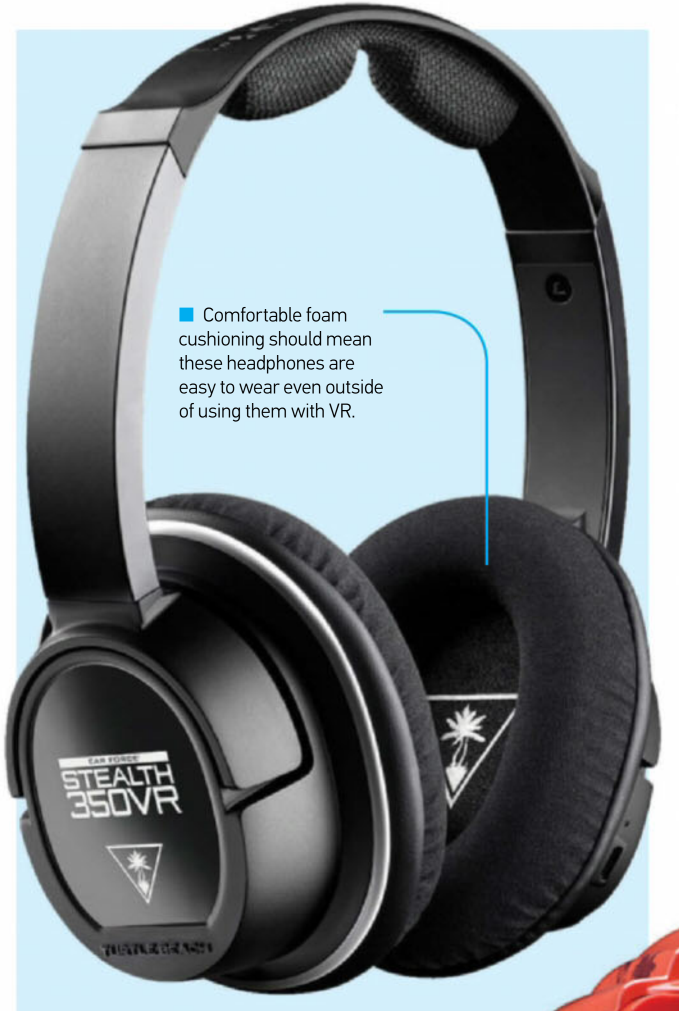
SOLDIER ZIP HOODY

For those who want to kick off the New Year with a healthy attitude, perhaps this Shinra Soldier training top is for you. Once again the design is a nice nod to a gaming classic with a cool weathered effect.
www.gametee.co.uk



SEA SALT ICE CREAM HOODIE

Finally, a *Kingdom Hearts* top. This one is a pullover with some nice features. The print for starters is gorgeous, of course, but there's also a little eyelet in the pouch and loops in the neck for feeding through headphones.
www.gametee.co.uk



Comfortable foam cushioning should mean these headphones are easy to wear even outside of using them with VR.

STEALTH 350VR

SOLD BY: **TURTLE BEACH** PRICE: **£59.99**

THERE ARE PLENTY of headsets out there that are perfectly compatible with VR headsets, whether you are using them on PC or on PS4, but this is one of the first we've seen that is specifically designed to work around the contours of a VR device as well as offer the high-level of 3D audio experience that true immersion demands.

The key is a design that takes into account the headband and cables that are a prerequisite of any VR headset, allowing some clearance around whatever device you might be using. That should stop you from feeling like your head is being squeezed or that your gaming headset is going to snap in half. It also means you don't need to compromise audio quality by moving over to in-ear headphones.

And as with any Turtle Beach headset, you're getting good value for money for the audio quality this device offers. Bass boost, battery-powered amplification and mic monitoring are all welcome additional features.
turtlebeach.com

FALLOUT NUKA COLA MACHINE MINI REFRIGERATOR

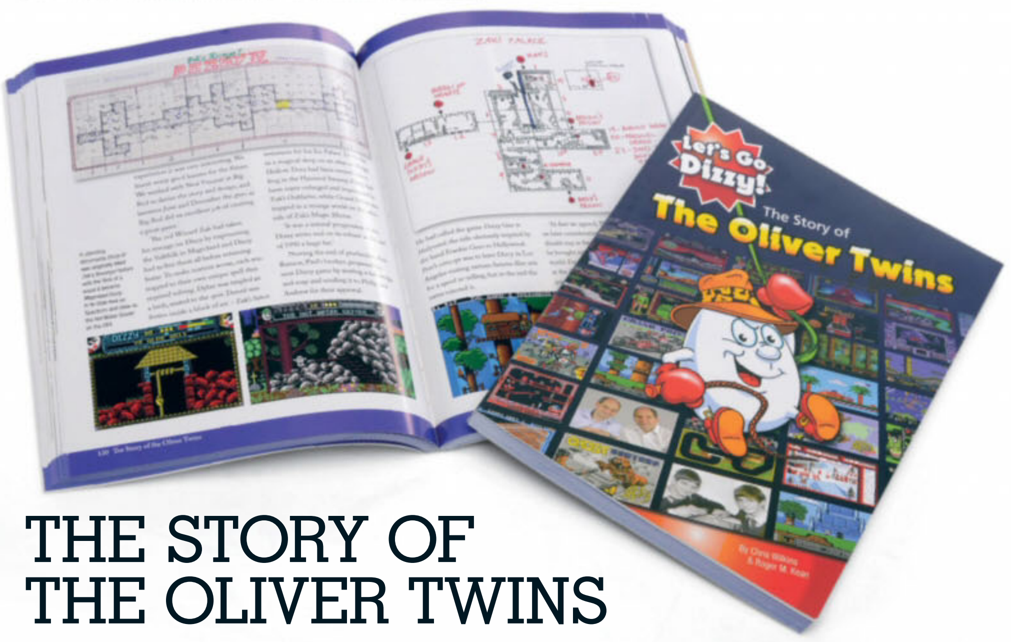
SOLD BY: **THINK GEEK** PRICE: **$149.99**

WITH ROOM ENOUGH for a couple of bottles of Nuka Cola and four cans of your second-favourite brew, this little fridge is a nice little addition to your *Fallout* merchandise collection; something we imagine is starting to look rather intimidating. The *Fallout* spin-off material shows no signs of slowing down at the moment with more and more products coming out. Think Geek alone has a whole new wave of products including plush toys and clothing.

The fridge itself is a Think Geek exclusive and features a light on top so you can be sure to find it even in the dark. It has removable shelves and can actually hold up to 12 12oz cans, if you want. It plugs directly into the wall, but does need a little clearance for ventilation, so it needs to be more or less free standing – which is not so bad if you're going to sit it next to your PC. So, ultimately it's a little frivolous, but we kind of like it for that.
thinkgeek.com







THE STORY OF THE OLIVER TWINS

PUBLISHER: **FUSION RETRO BOOKS**

THERE ARE FEW figures in the gaming industry through whom you can see the evolution, boom, crash, resurgence and dominance of the medium, but the Oliver twins are among them. Philip and Andrew Oliver began their path to legendary status in videogames with type-in games back in 1983 and would go on to work on famous titles such as *Dizzy*, *Ghost Hunters* and, in more recent years, *SkySaga*.

This collection, put together by Chris Wilkins and Roger M Kean, chronicles their entire career with first-person accounts from the brothers on their path through the industry, the ideas behind their most famous releases and memories from many of their colleagues over the years. It's a merry cast of gaming legends with the likes of Paul Ranson, Ash Hogg, David Darling and many more adding their voices to the history.

The whole book is printed on very high-quality paper with wonderfully rich colours that help all of the retro screens, boxart and relevant pop culture imagery shine with each page you turn. If you grew up playing the games of the Oliver twins or just consider yourself something of a gaming historian, then this account with its direct access and wonderful anecdotes is an essential purchase. **www.fusionretrobooks.com**



TOMB RAIDER: SPORE

Picking up Lara's story from the end of *Rise Of The Tomb Raider*, this new graphic novel follows our intrepid antiquity hunter as she looks for a mushroom that is said to grant immortality. Isn't that just a power-up from *Super Mario*? Possibly, but we doubt this is an unexpected crossover. **www.darkhorse.com**



THE ART OF TITANFALL 2

Respawn Entertainment's shooters have been gorgeous affairs, built on a rich world that has far more depth that *Titanfall* and *Titanfall 2* really had much time to show us. This collection of concepts and art from the latest entry gives a much better insight into how it was constructed. **www.titanbooks.com**



PHOENIX IV: THE HISTORY OF THE VIDEOGAME INDUSTRY

This is one of the most comprehensive collections on the history of gaming you could wish to find. A colour edition is planned for later this year, but even in black and white, it is packed full of stories and content. **www.rolentapress.com**



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